

## Healthy Relationship High School Teachers Toolkit

Monash Education

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# Technology Risks for Teens (for parents)

## New Pressures on Teens & Risks of Technology

More than any previous generation, today's teens are connected to one another, and to the world, via digital technology. Recent data suggests that social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace have surpassed email as the preferred method of communication in all age groups. While today's teens may be more digitally savvy than earlier generations, their lack of maturity and life experience can quickly get them into trouble with these new social venues.

Teen relationships are impacted by cell phones and social networking sites. It is important that you talk with your teen about social media and monitor a young teen's use of social networking sites to help them navigate this new online social world.

As a parent, you should learn about these electronic technologies first hand – there is simply no better way to learn than to have a profile yourself.

Parents need to consider creating age-appropriate limits on the use of these technologies. Make sure you are clear with your teen about what you consider appropriate "electronic" behaviour. Just as certain language is unacceptable in your house, make sure you let your teen know what is and is not allowed online. Give reminders of those expectations from time to time. It doesn't mean you don't trust your son or daughter, it just reinforces that care about him or her enough to be paying attention.

For all teens, emphasize that everything sent over the Internet or by cell phone can be shared with the entire world. So, it is important your teen uses good judgment in sending messages and pictures and that he or she set appropriate privacy settings on social media sites. Parents need to discuss what "good judgment" means and the consequences of poor judgment – ranging from minor punishment to possible legal action in the case of sexting or bullying. Remember to make a point of discouraging your teen from gossiping, spreading rumours, bullying, or damaging someone's reputation via texting or other technologies.

To keep your teen safe, have your teen show you where the privacy features are for the social networking sites he or she is using. The more private the settings, the less likely inappropriate material will be received by your teen or sent to his or her circle of friends.

## Young Teens and Technology

As a parent, you will need to strike a balance between safety concerns and the normal developmental need of young teens to separate from their parents. As a safety precaution, parents should consider some level of monitoring of your young teen's use of these technologies.

Periodically check chat logs, emails, files, and social networking profiles for inappropriate content, friends, messages, and images.

Be transparent about any type of monitoring and let your young teen know what you are doing. Transparency is critical to continue to build trust between you and your young teen. Some families may check once a week and others more sporadically. Other parents might consider formal monitoring systems to track your young teen's email, chat, instant messaging, and image content. Whatever level of monitoring you choose as a parent, talk with your teen and let them know why you are concerned about their safety. As your teen matures, you should allow them more privacy and autonomy.

## Warning signs of use of technology and unhealthy relationships

- Relationships with friends or peers that require constant contact
- Skipping activities, meals, and homework or a drop in grades
- Sleeping with a cell phone under his or her pillow or on his or her chest
- Having irrational reactions to being without a phone or Internet access or having to answer the phone right away
- Substantial increases in the amount of time spent talking, texting, or on social networking sites
- Taking unnecessary risks such as using a cell phone at inappropriate times (during class, etc.)you