

Children's Mental Health Network

August 7, 2026

Topic: Technology and Children's Mental Health



Belonging
the key to wellness



WISCONSIN OFFICE OF
**Children's
Mental Health**

Agenda

1. OCMH Announcements
2. Early Years / Raising Kids in a Tech-Filled World
3. Adolescent Development, Well-being, and Technology – The Intersection
4. Youth Check-In
5. Behavioral Health Providers Discussion
6. Learn More – Small Group Discussion (select your room)
7. Adjourn

Meeting topic:
Technology and
Children's
Mental Health

OCMH Updates

Building Mental Wellness Copy & Drop

Monthly children's mental health article to use in your newsletter or communications.

[Sign up](#) to receive it.



OCMH Updates

Newsletter sign ups

- Monthly OCMH Newsletter
- Research News in Youth Mental Health
- Lived Experience
- Sign up [here](#)



OCMH Updates

Youth Insights – New Youth Voice OCMH [Web Page](#)



Students Spoke, We Listened

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

We asked Wisconsin teens about AI – what excites them and what concerns them. Their answers are insightful.

What excites you about AI?

- Creating new thoughts.
- Can make new discoveries.
- Learning new things.
- It is easy to find and access information.
- Quick results.
- Assistance with everyday activities.
- Having AI as a friend.
- Helps me with studying and learning.
- Free answers.
- Homework help.
- Nothing!
- New possibilities.
- Gives me good ideas and organizes my ideas.

What concerns you about AI?

- Believing everything it says. Relying on it.
- Not being able to tell what is real.
- Bullying.
- Cheating.
- Replacing human connection, loss of socialization.
- Loss of creative thinking.
- Dependence on it.
- Hurts the environment — effects climate, harms the planet, uses too much water and energy.
- It takes jobs.
- It isn't always accurate.
- Loss of privacy and security.
- Taking over the world.
- Turning to AI instead of therapists.
- Lose the ability for critical thinking.

Wisconsin high school youth shared these thoughts at the Mental Wellness Student Leadership Summit 2026 hosted by the Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health on April 17, 2026 in Madison.

WISCONSIN OFFICE OF Children's Mental Health
children.wi.gov



Students Spoke, We Listened

Vaping

We asked Wisconsin teens about vaping – why teens are doing it and why they shouldn't. They provided great insight.

Why are teens vaping?

- To seem cool.
- To fit in.
- To escape.
- Coping.
- Vaping is easier than smoking.
- Peer pressure.
- For a distraction.
- To relieve or deal with stress.
- Suppress appetite.

What is the most convincing reason for teens not to vape?

- You can ruin your future.
- Look like a loser.
- The effects it has on your life-style.
- Thinning hair.
- Cancer.
- Wasted memories.
- Death.
- It will make problems worse.
- More kids don't vape than do.
- Wrecks relationships.
- It's really not cool.
- Reduces sports performance.
- Damages your lungs.
- Effects mental health.
- Yellow teeth.

HEALTH PROBLEMS:

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Newest Flyers:

- [AI](#)
- [Vaping](#)



Technology and Children's Mental Health



Early Years / Raising Kids in a Tech-Filled World

Dr. Roxy Etta

Child Development & Parenting State
Specialist – UW-Madison Division of
Extension, Human Development &
Relationships Institute



Extension
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Raising Kids in a Tech-Filled World

Presentation for Children's Mental Health Network
August 7, 2026

Presented by
Roxy Etta,
PhD





Healthy Media Habits Series

 Child Abuse & Neglect
Prevention Board

About Us ▾ Our Approach ▾ Our Work ▾ Family Resource Centers ▾ Funding ▾ Support ▾

Healthy Media Habits series

Healthy Media Habits videos

Healthy Media Habits Toolkit

Wisconsin Core Competencies for Family Support Professionals and Application Tools

Wisconsin Family Support Professional Code of Ethical Conduct

Family Resource Center Professional Development System

Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your work training

Online Learning Library

Healthy Media Habits Video Series

This video series is designed for parents and caregivers of children from birth to age 5. It shares the latest research on how to use media, like TV, videos, and apps, in a healthy way. It explains how to check if media is good quality and how to choose the best options for young children. The series also provides tips on how to keep track of media use and how to get the most benefit when media is used.



Healthy Media Habits
Video 1: Our Responsibility to Shape Children's Digital World

Kids spend a lot of time with media, sometimes even more than time spent in school. Dr. Roxy Elta and Dr. Liz Horgan share new tips on how to use media in a healthy way, focusing on both the amount of screen time and what kids watch. It's important for caregivers to help guide and talk with kids about their media use to keep it balanced and healthy.

Watch this 12-minute video [here](#).

[Video1_Handouts.pdf](#) / [Spanish_Video1_Handouts.pdf](#)



Healthy Media Habits
Video 2: The Risks and Benefits of Screens

Research shows that screens can be both good and bad for young kids. Too much screen time can lead to problems like weight gain, trouble sleeping, and delays in learning, but using screens for learning and playing can be helpful and fun. It's important for adults to balance screen time, pick good content, and spend time with kids while they use screens to make it a positive experience. Watch this 13-minute video [here](#).

[Video2_handout.pdf](#) / [Spanish_Video2Handout.pdf](#)



Healthy Media Habits
Video 3.1: Evaluating Media Content & Choosing High-Quality Options for TV, Videos, and Movies

This video contains two parts separated by a short intermission. Part one focuses on choosing high-quality TV shows, videos and movies for young children. Part two focuses on choosing high-quality apps. It's important to choose videos and apps for kids that support their learning and growth. The video shares why it is important to avoid shows that are too loud or scary and how to make choices that are both fun and educational for kids. The handouts contain sample lists to help guide you and the video shows you how best to use them. Watch this 11-minute video [here](#).

[Video3_Handouts.pdf](#) / [SpanishVideo3_Handouts.pdf](#)

thos
media
moms

SCAN ME



Overview

Topics Covered

Why Early
Habits Matter

Strategies to
Promote Healthy
Media Use

Young Children's
Media Use

The Role
Parents &
Caregivers Play

Young Children's Screen Use



Young Children's Screen Use



By 2 years old, 40% of children have their OWN tablet



By 8 years old, 23% of children have their OWN phone



23% of young children use devices for comfort, at mealtime, or to fall asleep



75% of parents do not use any tools or settings to manage children's screen time

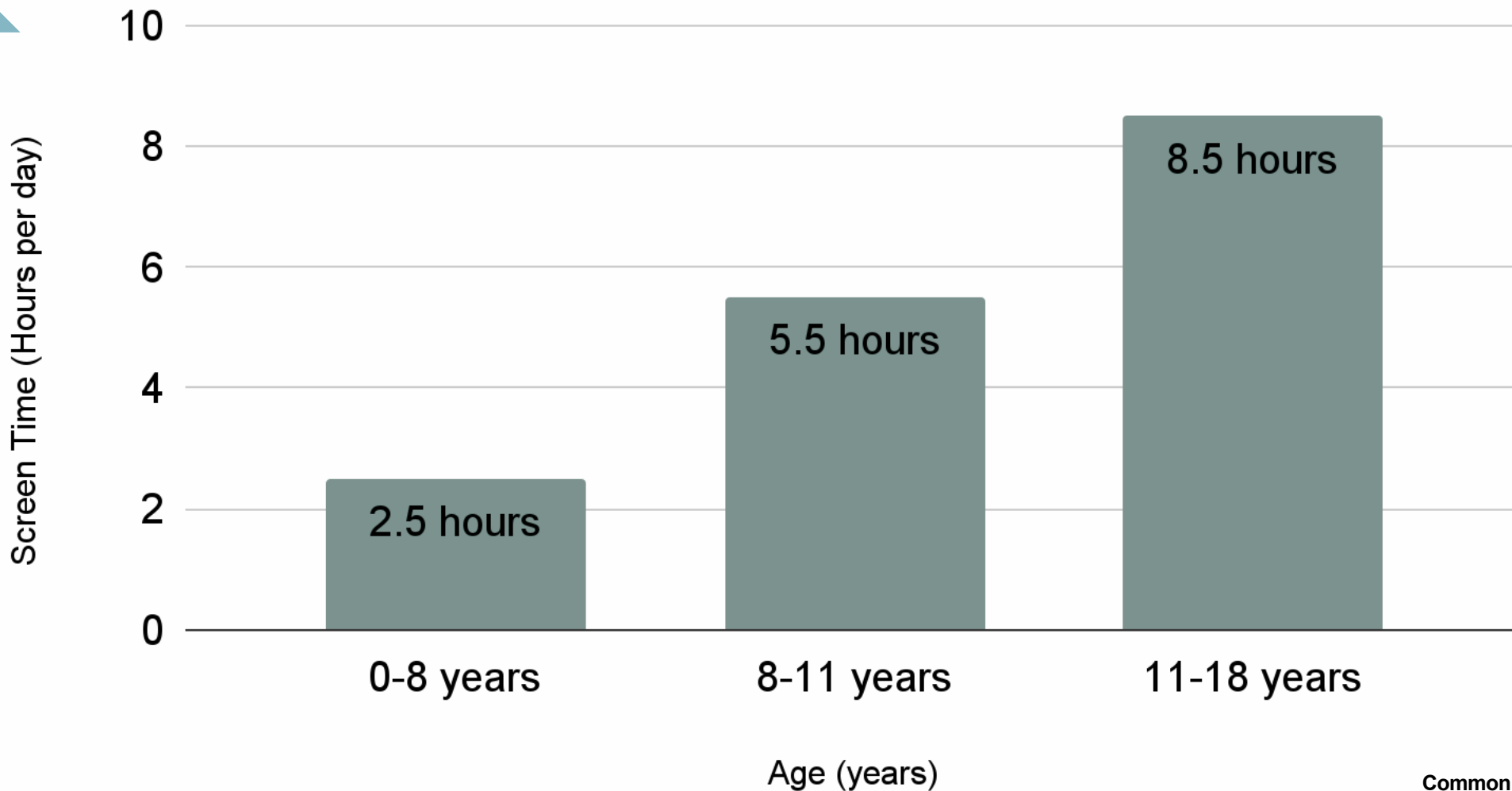


51% of parents do not restrict the types of content their children have access to

Screens & Early Development

- Children **under 18 months** of age have **difficulty learning** from screens
- **High-quality, educational content** for preschoolers can be **beneficial**:
promote prosocial behaviors, language learning, and STEM learning
- **Heavy screen use** is associated with **delays** in language, cognitive, social-emotional, executive functioning, fine motor development, poorer sleep, less reading, and pretend play

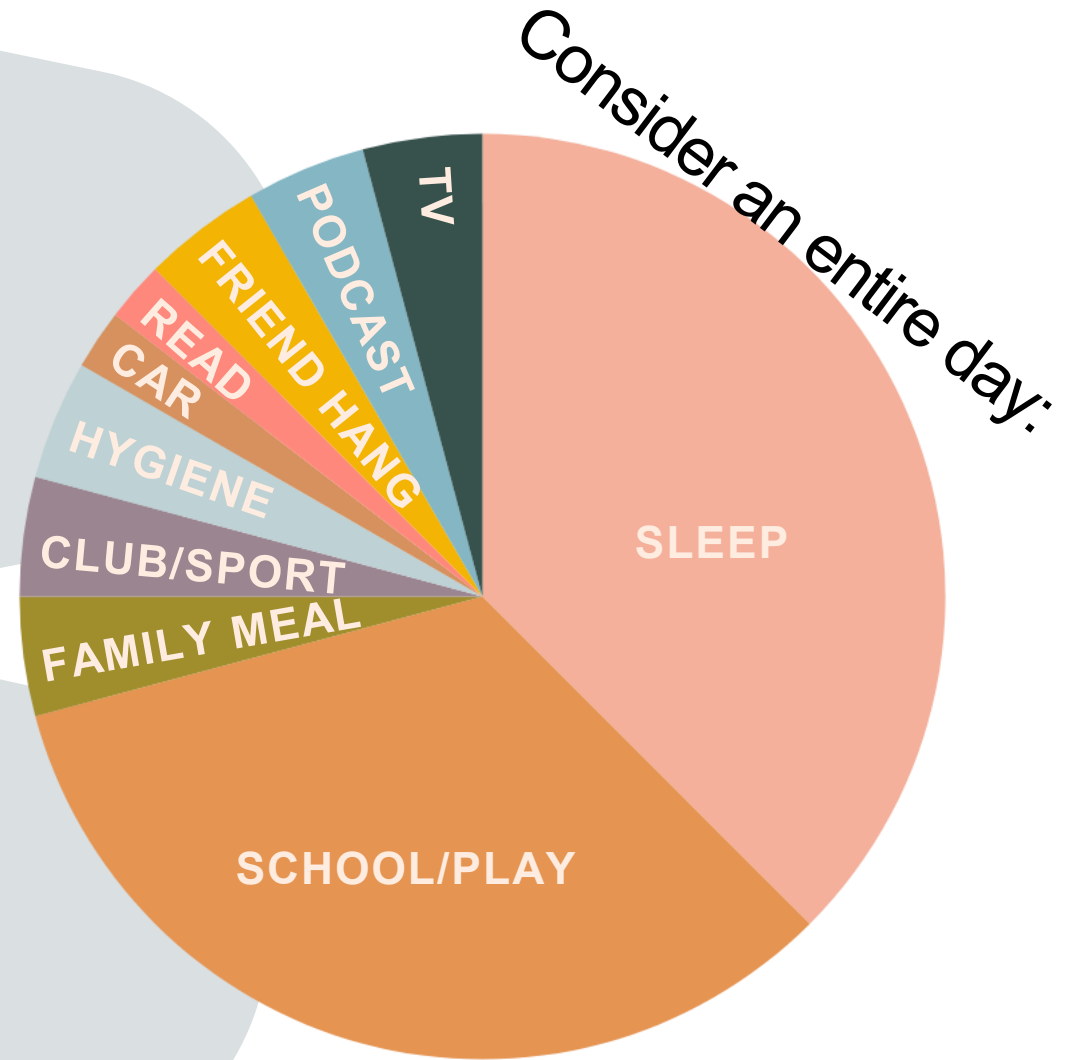
Children's Screen Time



Screen Time

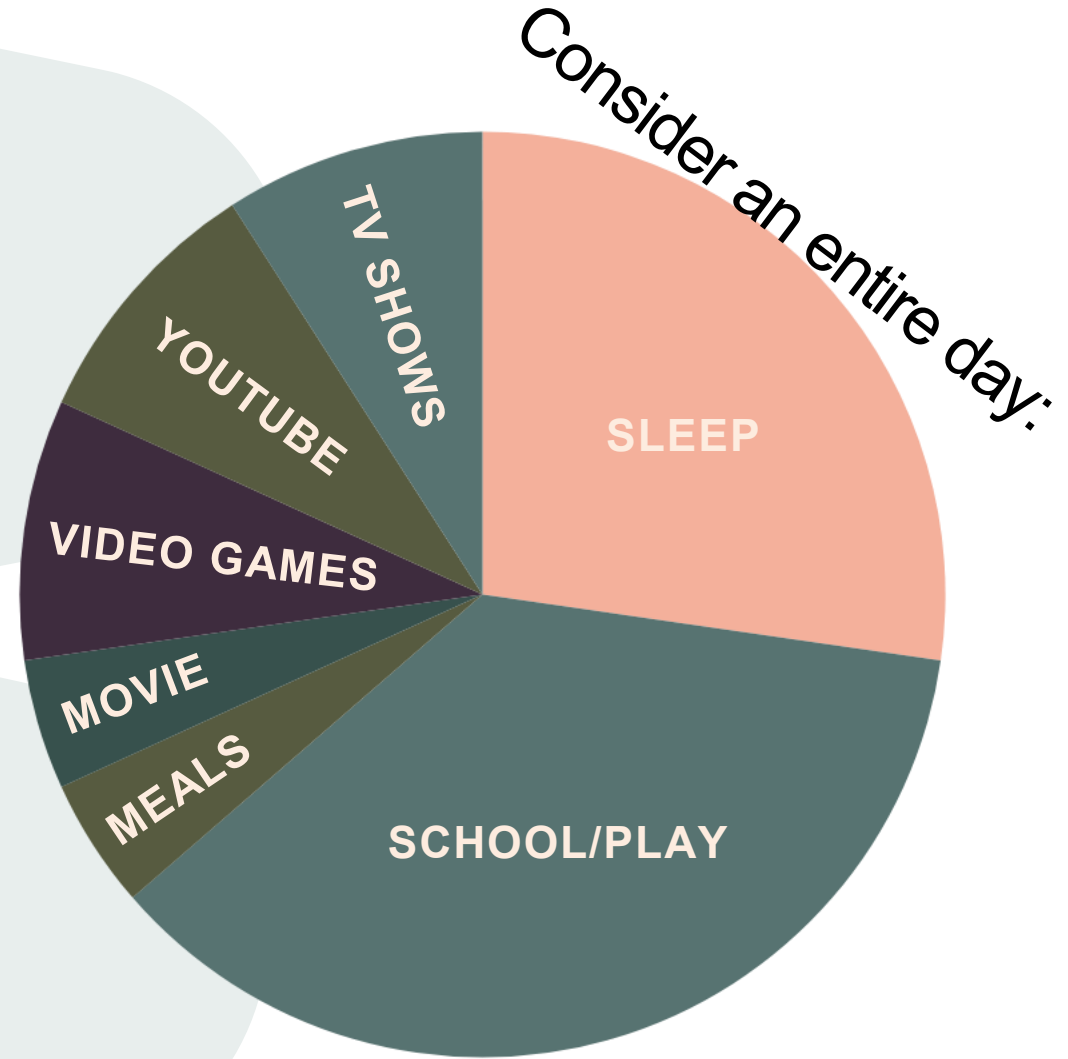
FAQ:

*How many minutes
per day
is too much?*



Screen Time

Ask instead:
*Are screens
crowding out
other important
activities?*



American Academy of Pediatrics' New Policy Statement



POLICY STATEMENT Organizational Principles to Guide and Define the Child Health Care System and/or Improve the Health of all Children



Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents: Policy Statement

Tiffany Munzer, MD, FAAP,¹ Joanna Parga-Belinky, MD, FAAP,² Libby Marble Milovich, MD, FAAP,³ Susy Tampakou, MD, FAAP,⁴ Tawee Kurniati, DO,⁵ Corrin Green, MD, FAAP,⁶ Roslyn Gerwin, DO,⁷ Shari Madigan, PhD, R. Psych,^{8,9} and the Council on Communications and Media

abstract

Digital media, including television, the internet, social media, video games, and interactive assistants, form the digital ecosystem. When this digital ecosystem is designed with children's unique developmental needs in mind, it can support learning and well-being. In contrast, digital ecosystems that prioritize engagement and commercialization often encourage prolonged use, which in turn can displace healthy behaviors (eg, movement behaviors, sleep), and contribute to negative outcomes. This policy statement follows the conceptual framework of the sociological model, depicting nested circles of care including: children's own characteristics, their caregivers, the digital ecosystem, as well as broader societal systems. Given the interconnected nature of these influences and systems, "media and children" cannot be viewed solely through the lens of individual child behaviors or screen limits alone. Recommendations are provided for families, pediatric providers, practitioners (eg, psychologists, social workers, counselors, educators, researchers), industry, and policy makers, aiming to provide strengths-based solutions and promote a more child-centered digital ecosystem.

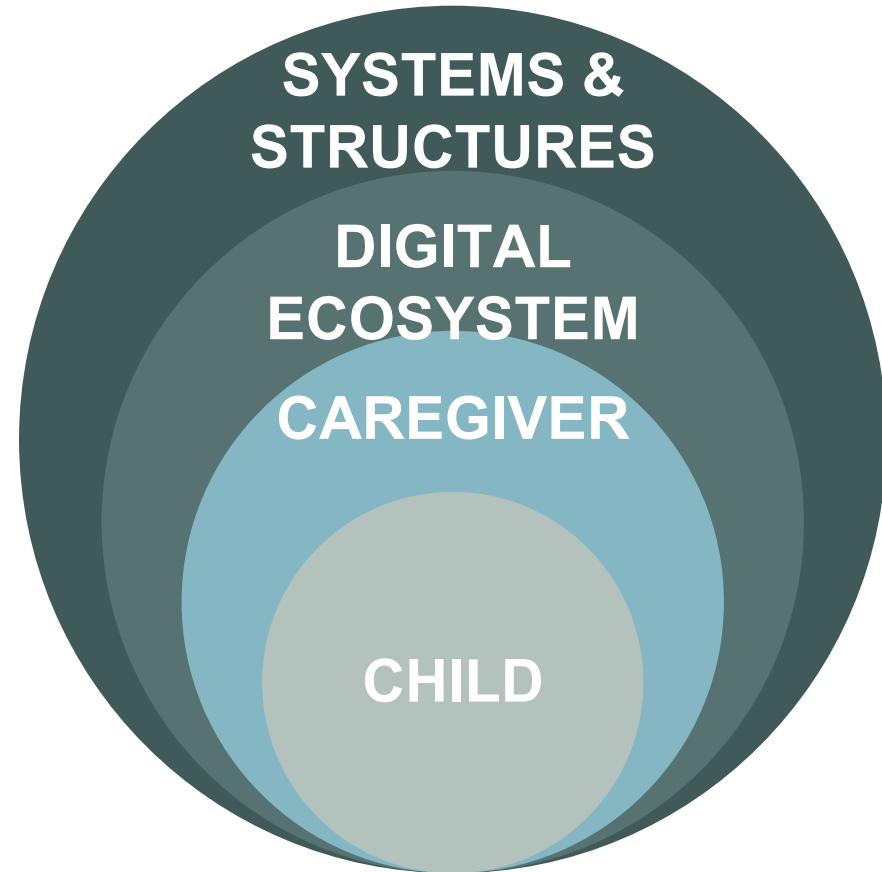
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Caregivers: Parents, foster parents, family members, child care providers who participate in direct care of children.

Child-centered design: Developmentally appropriate digital designs that provide privacy, safety, meaningful experiences, and support youth learning and well-being.

Digital ecosystems: Digital environments, including but not limited to the internet, algorithms, artificial intelligence, social media, apps, video games, TV, interactive agents, tablets, and mobile devices.

Engagement-based design: Digital designs which compete for user's attention, interaction, and data, often incentivized by revenue structures. Synonyms might include persuasive, profit-driven, or manipulative design.





Why Early Habits Matter

Problematic Media Use

Signs:

- Shifts in behavior (physically, emotionally, socially, or functionally)
- Lower grades due to too much screen use
- Being emotionally withdrawn
- Avoiding in-person social connections
- Important activities are being crowded out (sleep, exercise)
- Screens are the default way to calm emotions

Problematic Media Use

	Problematic Media Use	Addiction
View of Media	Screens can help or hurt depending on how they're used	Screens are always harmful, like drugs or alcohol
Terminology	Accepted language in the research and medical communities	Language that is stigmatizing and alarmist
Scope of the Problem	Suggests a range of media-related challenges that vary in severity	Suggests an extreme, permanent, or all-or-nothing problem
Locus of Control	Recognizes the role of media design features that keep eyes on screen	Focuses blame primarily on the child's choices and behavior
Solutions	Seems like a problem that can be solved with the right support	Seems like a problem that is fixed or difficult to address

The Ripple Effects

- Problematic media use can start in early childhood
- Early problematic media habits tend to continue and grow over time
- Disconnection and reliance on screens lead to later challenges
- Early routines and caregiver guidance can shift the trajectory toward healthier outcomes





The Role Parents & Caregivers Play

Prevention of problematic media use starts in the early years.



- Children copy what adults do
- Screens matter before kids own/use them
- Early routines shape family norms

TECHNOFERENCE



A large, stylized orange handprint graphic is centered on a light orange background. The handprint is composed of several rounded, overlapping shapes that form the fingers and palm. In the center of the handprint, the text "Strategies to Promote Healthy Media Use" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font, arranged in two lines.

Strategies to Promote Healthy Media Use

AREAS OF ACTION:

- Child
- Content
- Context
- Calm
- Crowding out
- Communication

American Academy of Pediatrics, 2025



Child

Media use should match the individual child's age, needs, and temperament.

strategy #1

Help caregivers:

- **Observe how their child responds to media**
- **Tailor media boundaries to fit their individual child and family**
- **Recognize signs of problematic media use**

“What is your child's personality like?”

“How does this influence the types of media they choose?”

“How does your child handle the end of screen time?”

Content

The quality of shows and apps children use matters as much as the quantity.

strategy #2

Help caregivers:

- **Choose high-quality, educational apps and shows**
- **Find age-appropriate content**
- **Discourage violent content**

“What types of shows or apps does your child usually watch or use?”

“How do you decide if a show or app is a good fit for your child?”

Context

How, why, and with whom media is used changes the outcome.

strategy #3

Help caregivers:

- **Prioritize co-viewing and co-playing**
- **Avoid background TV**
- **Model positive digital behaviors**

“When your child is using media, are you usually able to watch or talk with them?”

“Does your phone use ever affect time with your child?”

Calm

strategy #4

Screens can sometimes support, but never replace, emotional regulation skills.

Help caregivers:

- Encourage screen-free bedtime routines
- Create non-screen calming routines

“Do you notice any changes in your child’s mood or sleep when they use screens close to bedtime?”

“When your child is upset, tired, or bored, do you often offer them a screen?”

Crowding Out

Media use should not replace essential developmental activities.

strategy #5

Help caregivers:

- **Build a daily rhythm that prioritizes healthy development**
- **Establish tech-free zones in the home**
- **Delay children owning online-connected devices**

“What are your child’s favorite off-screen activities?”

“Does your family have any screen-free areas in the home?”

“What are your family’s ‘no phone’ times during the day?”

Communication

Talk with children about media to build understanding, empathy, and trust.

strategy #6

Help caregivers:

- **Have regular conversations about family media use**
- **Check in with their children daily about how they are feeling**

“Do you talk with your child about what they’re seeing on screens?”

“What tech boundaries does your family have at home?”

“How do you regularly check in with your child?”

**This is not a problem to be
addressed by individuals alone.**



**This is not a problem to be
addressed by individuals alone.**



**This is a community issue
that requires collective action.**



Presentation &
Workshop Requests

Thank you!

contact: etta@wisc.edu
badgertalks.wisc.edu/speaker/roxy-etta/

Wisconsin Early Learning and Development Guidelines

- A draft of the updated Early Learning and Development Guidelines (ELDGs) is now available for review.
- Read the section/s most relevant to your work.
- Deadline – August 21, 2026.
- Access the draft and take survey [here](#).



Adolescent Development, Well-being, and Technology – The Intersection

Dr. Gabriel Velez PhD

Associate Professor and Public Service Program
Coordinator – Marquette University

Overview

Digital Mental Health

- **Self-Help Tools**
- **Therapy Extenders**
- **Virtual Care Platforms**

Artificial Intelligence

- **Virtual Assistants**
- **Companion Bots**

Overview

Digital Mental Health (internet and mobile)

- **Self-Help Tools:** Resources or self-guided interventions that don't require a therapist but can serve as on-ramps or off-ramps to professional care
- **Therapy Extenders:** Blended care models that use technology alongside evidence-based psychotherapy
- **Virtual Care Platforms:** Technology-enabled delivery of therapy or interventions like telehealth

NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Digital Tools for Youth Mental Health Leadership Summit: Proceedings of a Workshop—in Brief (2026)

Chapter: Digital Tools for Youth Mental Health Leadership Summit: Proceedings of a Workshop – in Brief

Overview

Artificial Intelligence

- **Virtual Assistants:** help with tasks, answer questions; summarize information e.g. *ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Siri*
- **Companion Bots:** simulate human interactions; can build emotional or romantic bonds with 24/7 emotional support; programmed to be agreeable; always a safe space (sycophants)
e.g. *Character.AI, Replika*

Overview

Digital Mental Health

- Self-Help Tools
- Therapy Extenders
- Virtual Care Platforms



They work!

Artificial Intelligence

- Virtual Assistants
- Companion Bots



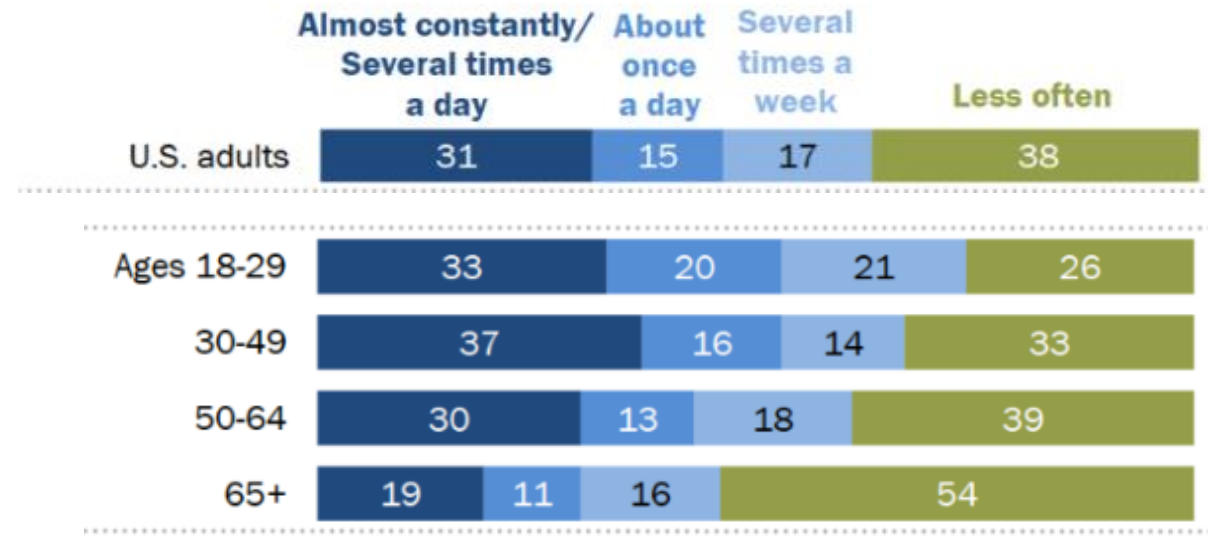
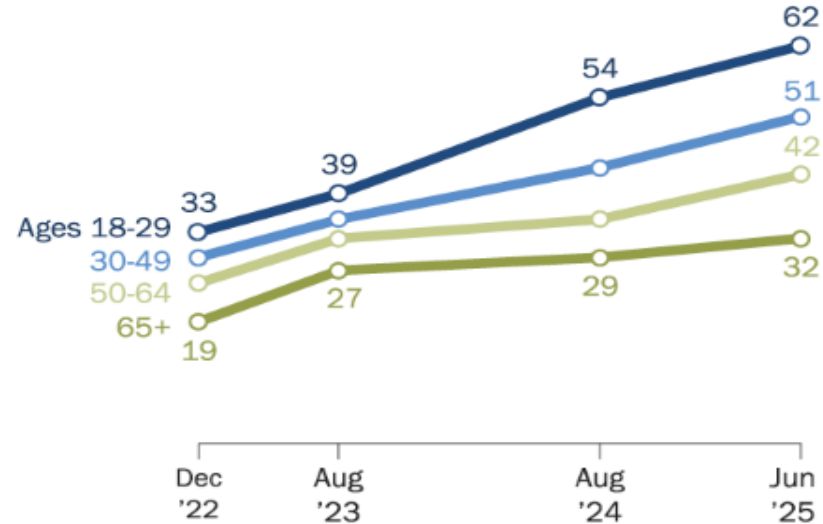
Too soon to tell!

AI Awareness and Use



The share of younger Americans who have heard a lot about AI has increased rapidly in the past few years

% who say they have heard or read **a lot** about artificial intelligence (AI)



 Pew Research Center

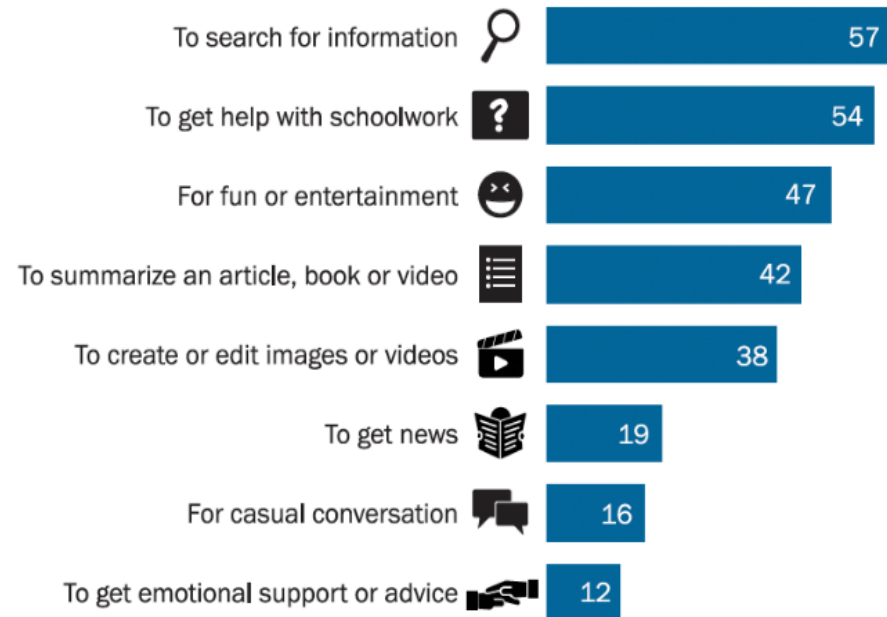
Young people are more aware and have adopted AI more quickly than any other age group.

AI Chatbots and Teens



More than half of teens say they have used AI chatbots for finding information, doing schoolwork

% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 who say they have ever used AI chatbots ...

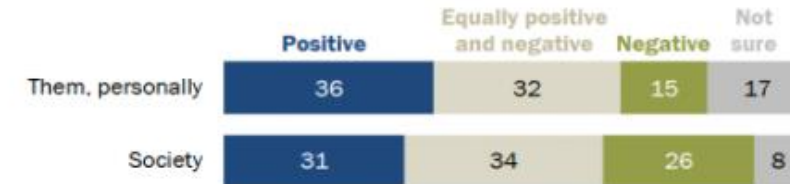


Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2025.
"How Teens Use and View AI"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Teens are more positive than negative about how AI will impact them

% of U.S. teens ages 13 to 17 who say they think the impact of AI on each of the following over the next 20 years will be ...

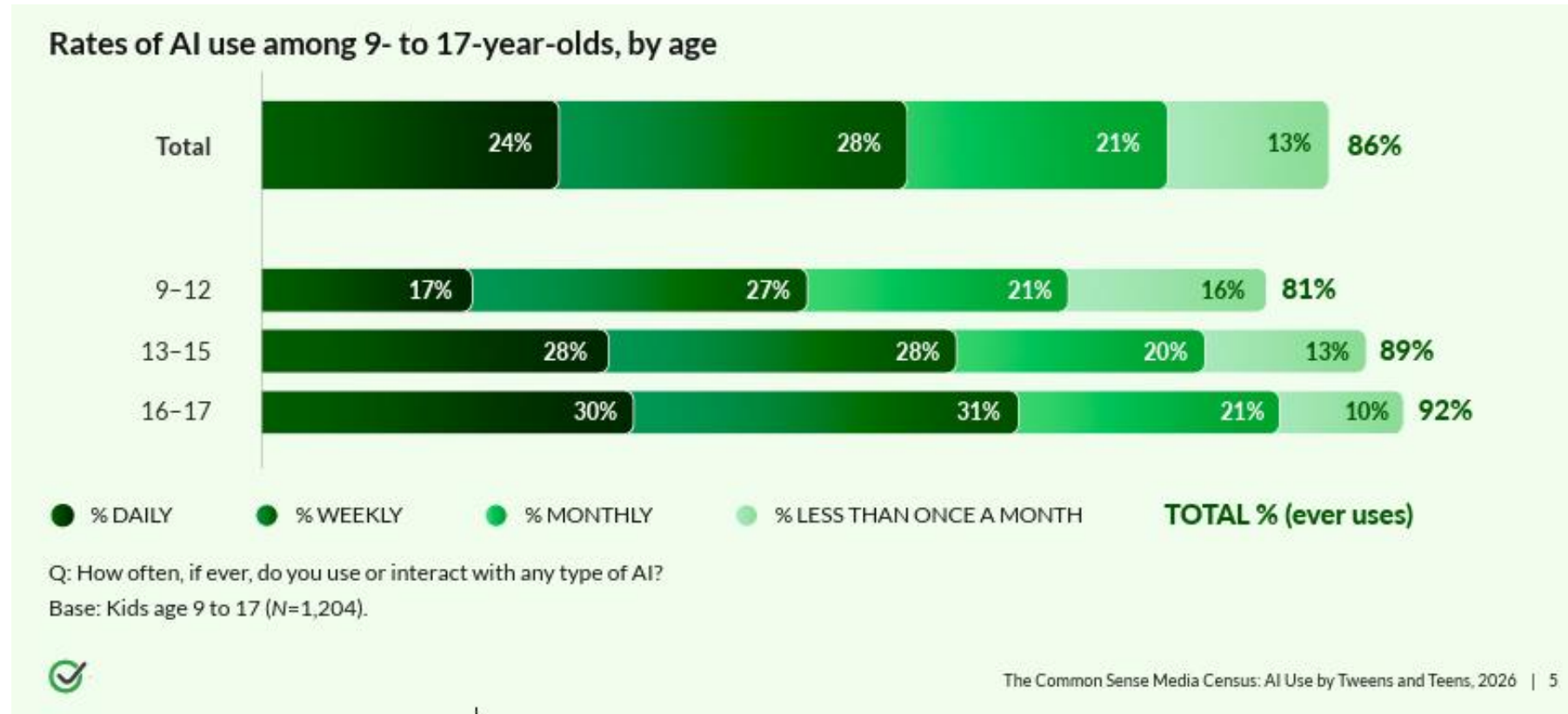


Note: "Very" and "somewhat positive" are combined, as are "very" and "somewhat negative." Those who did not answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2025.
"How Teens Use and View AI"



Teens are using AI to find information or get help with schoolwork. They have more positive than negative views on AI.

AI Chatbots and Teens



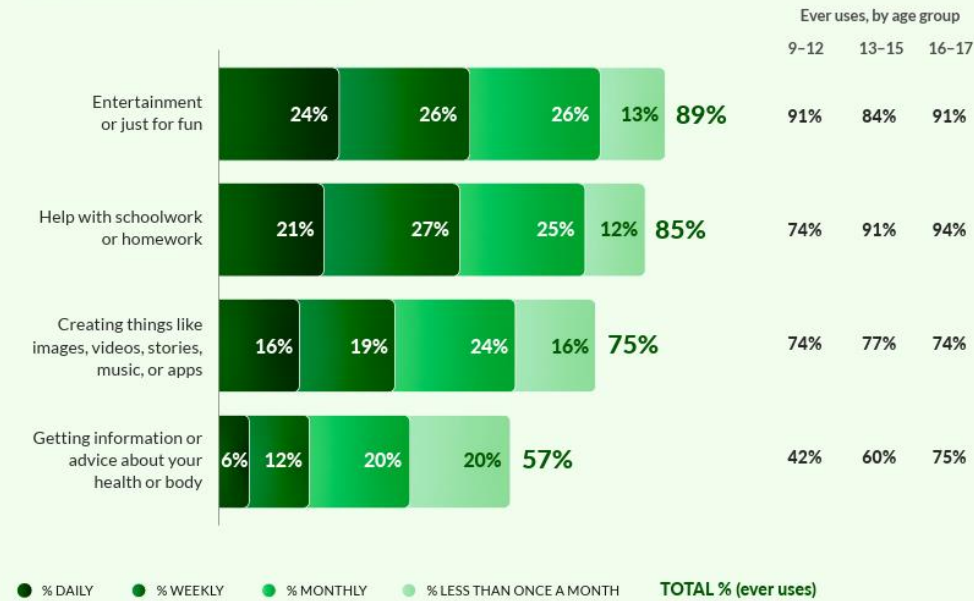
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AI Chatbots and Teens



FIGURE 2:

Top uses of AI among AI users age 9 to 17



Teens are using AI to find information or get help with schoolwork. They have more positive than negative views on AI.

AI Chatbots and Mental Health



- RAND survey found AI chatbots are **already embedded** in many **kids' mental health information ecosystem**.
- About **20%** of US adolescents and young adults (ages 12-21) had used AI chatbots **for mental health advice**. 92% said it was **helpful advice**.
- Most **did not tell anyone** that they used AI chatbot for mental health.



<https://www.rand.org/news/press/2026/06/nearly-1-in-5-us-adolescents-and-young-adults-use-ai.html>

AI chatbots are used by adolescents and young adults for emotional and psychological support.

Curiosity



Curiosity



“Did you ask a good question today?”

Counterpoint Questions for AI



1. **Opposition:** What is a good counter argument to this?
2. **Blind Spots:** What am I missing here?
3. **Perspectives:** How would someone with an equally valid but different mindset/worldview answer this?

Break

Youth Check-In

- **Kenai Volkman** (Marshfield)
- **Dean Swanlund** (McFarland)
- **Lydia Cheslock** (Pulaski)

See Students Spoke, We Listened flyer on AI [here](#)

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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Behavioral Health Providers

Jes Springer

Director of School Based Behavioral Health Services
– NorthLakes Community Clinic – Turtle Lake

Dr. Samia Khan

Owner and Psychotherapist – Whole Hearted
Wellness

Small Group Discussion

Select Your Discussion Room

1. **Early Years** – Dr. Roxy Etta
2. **Adolescent Well-being and Technology** – Dr. Gabriel Velez
3. **Behavioral Health Providers** – Jes Springer and Dr. Samia Khan

Discussion questions:

1. Any questions you have.
2. What are you seeing with kids and technology?
What are your concerns?



Next Meeting

November 6th

10 am-12 pm

Virtual



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