

Parenting Teens and Beyond

A Therapist's Toolkit for Working with Parents of Teens in the Digital Age

From Pessimistic To Optimistic

- Commiserate and empathize (with the parents and with kids growing up in this digital age).
- Help parents to feel empowered. Kids are mostly just living their lives and parents aren't victims.
- Take this seriously and also have fun with it - it is what it is, it's how we respond to it and how we integrate technology into our lives that counts
- Help parents clarify what they want, be intentional, and normalize this
- This can be an opportunity for self growth for parents and kids
- Try not to pathologize - be a role model and help soothe parents. They WILL get through this.
- Stay neutral but offer advice and support - technology is neutral, it's how we use it or over-use it that causes the issues. It's the fear of technology that causes a lot of the problems. If we can stay neutral our clients will feel less activated.

From Fear and Judgment to Curiosity

- Help parent unpack their fears
- Use the *"What type of Screentime Parent Are You?"*handout to help parents see what type of screen time parent they are
- Help the parents to develop a positive bias
 - What is the parent doing well? Where do they feel successful as a parent? Bring in each parent's strengths and use those around this space
 - What are the good things that technology brings to their lives, homes, and kids? What has their child learned because of technology?
 - What are the good things about their kids? Where are their kids thriving?
- Help parents to embrace a "Bottom Up" Approach when it comes to technology
 - How can parents encourage their kids to help them to learn more about technology? To help the parents with technology challenges?

From Protection to Preparation

- Start With the End In Mind - who do we want our kids to be when they are adults? Have them actually explain what they imagine.
- Help parents to assess whether their kids are thriving by looking at the child holistically - are they involved, have friends, move their bodies, do alright in school, spend time with family, generally in a good place? Or are they not thriving. If they ARE thriving, consider that perhaps there is nothing to worry about. If they aren't thriving, look at the deeper causes because technology over-use is often a symptom of deeper problems.
- Encourage the parents to be a positive role model - to look closely at their habits and see where they might want to make adjustments.
 - Help parents with their own use of technology, sleep habits, work habits, judgments of their kids use, etc.
 - Pay attention to parenting styles and see how this contributes to their challenges around technology
- Help parents to be present to all of it, normalize it and find humor
- If a parent has a child who is over-using technology - help to get clear on the reasons WHY they are over-using technology vs. just limiting it because we see it as a problem.
 - What are they feeling? Are they escaping from something? What's going wrong that has them wanting to escape? Are they feeling disconnected from you? From their friends? Is this a form of self-medication? Escape?
- Help parents to set limits - ideally created together with the child - sometimes they really do need us to help them.
- Help parents to develop the resilience and inner fortitude to be able to handle the digital world we live in. Then, help them to cultivate the skills needed in their kids. To help them to be successful IN this world instead of fighting the world they live in.
 - Mindfulness & Breath
 - Calming activities
 - Managing their triggers
 - How do they "fill their cup"?
 - Get more Sleep

Parenting Teens and Beyond

A Therapist's Toolkit for Working with Parents of Teens in the Digital Age

From Protection to Preparation (cont'd)

- Encourage parents to be more of a mentor than over monitoring and micromanaging.
 - Use it as an opportunity to connect with our kids.
 - Remind parents that we have lots of knowledge about how to be a human and how to be in relationship with kids. We must bring that wisdom to our kids and weave that into what they know about being online.
 - Be the person that they CAN discuss this with.
 - Encourage them to work with their kids to find solutions that work for both the parent and the child - co-create.
- Have parents complete the handout: *How do you want to be with your kids as it relates to technology - 3 adjectives.*

From Restrictive and Reactive to Creative and Balanced

- Parents need tools to support them as they try to keep a balanced home:
 - Help them create “digital detoxes” and safe digital zones in their families.
 - Encourage them use technology as a tool for connection
 - Get support from your peers and other kids on what they are doing - what works, what doesn't - we are in a “no man's land”
 - Educate yourself - all of this changes fast
 - Use Common Sense Media
 - Give parents the *Lay of the Land* Handout
 - Come up with house rules together. Negotiate and discuss them.
 - Make changes gradually especially for older kids
 - Include family rituals, nature, time together - push family values and identity
- Passwords, checking phone? Every parent/household is different
- Look for teachable moments
- Use monitoring and limiting apps and devices as needed - just don't let that replace the conversations that are needed. Overtime, parental controls and limits need to be backed off so that the child has a chance to be in the “open internet” and learn while at home.
- Some common discussions to have with clients so they can discuss with their kids
 - Sexting (sending nude photos)
 - Being Safe on Social Media “Think Before You Post”
 - “Think before you respond” - understand how the brain works around triggers and how to walk away before you post something you regret
 - “Think before you share” - don't share your address, phone number or other personal details
 - “Think before you connect” - is this a friend? Is it possible that this person doesn't have your best interest in mind? Talk about predators
 - How media manipulates us
 - How to be discerning when you read information on the Internet - is it true?
 - Their Digital Footprint (that everything stays out there forever)
 - Sleep (the importance of sleep for their health)
 - Addiction (how it happens, what to pay attention to)

Parenting Teens and Beyond

A Therapist's Toolkit for Working with Parents of Teens in the Digital Age

From Restrictive and Reactive to Creative and Balanced (cont'd)

- Help parents define their family values and impart those to their teens.
 - Help them define several ways they can teach their kids “old fashioned” values, such as delayed gratification, manners and looking people in the eye.
 - Encourage them to ask their kids what's important to THEM - what are their goals? Healthy relationships? More time with parents? No phones at their sports games? Healthy body?
 - Assess where the parents are and the parent's perception of where the kids are on the *Wheel of Balance*
 - Encourage the parents to have their teens do their own wheel of balance
- Bringing in more balance using the Crowding Out Technique
 - Help parents to brainstorm a list of things teens DO like to do and how to bring more of those into their lives (eat, have friends over, go to the movies, shop, go to the beach, play sports, listen to music, do their make up, puzzles, watch TV, etc.)
 - Help parents to brainstorm ways to actually “play” with each other and their teens.
 - Expose them to fun things where technology is not going to be used. Museums, trips, beach, fly a kite, go on a hike, play a board game. Like dieting - bring in more non-tech activities rather than just cutting out technology.
 - Go on a trip where there will be no wifi or phone access. Let them see how it feels after the first few days to be offline

From Control and Divisiveness to Connection and Empathy

- Encourage the parents to be their kids' ally and mentor
 - Find the meaning behind their kids use
 - Build a growth mindset for parents and kids
 - Let certain things go
 - Help parents to learn to “connect and re-direct” with their kids around tech rather than alienating them, yelling at them, forcefully pulling the device out of their hands, etc.
 - There was a study that if you were to walk over, sit next to your kid and ask them what they're up to, let them talk and then suggest it's time to get off, they do better. This allows them to shift from the dopamine boost to a human connection and are more likely to respond favorably. The child was younger, but it's the concept to keep in mind. Perhaps with younger tweens and teens.
- Use the *Empowered Conversation* handout: Use the empowered conversation model to teach this to parents. Talking to kids about tech can actually bring families closer.
- Be curious about their online lives. Meet them where they are and in their interests instead of just complaining and hating on their online lives. This helps in these ways:
 - Build (or rebuild) Connection.
 - Makes it safe to bring up this part of their lives.
 - You show your kids you care about their whole life (not just the parts you approve of).
- Keep the lines of communication open. Focus on empathy
 - Maybe we are more similar to them than we think. Put ourselves in their shoes. What was important to me? What did I need?
 - Kids use social media and specific apps TO fit in - Can we empathize with how hard it must be to be always on social media?
 - Some kids are so busy with sports, etc that they actually DON'T have time to do anything but have an online life
 - Most of us can relate at some level to the allure of the phone. We are all trying to figure it out together.
 - How do we keep talking about it? Can we talk about our own challenges around balancing our use of technology

Parenting Teens and Beyond

A Therapist's Toolkit for Working with Parents of Teens in the Digital Age

What to do when their kids get into trouble or are making bad choices?

- Help the parents so they don't freak out, don't call the other parents, don't call the school and ask for x kid to be suspended, take technology away - stay with the kids and think through the problem. Don't take phone away, but encourage them not to contribute to the problem. Figure out what happened and how you want to handle it (in real life).
 - Try not to get into the tunnel of "who said it, why, etc." Instead try to have stock answer (e.g., "I'm here, I'm reading this, I know this is not true, if I were in your place, I would never do this to you." or "This makes me not want to go to school tomorrow but I am going to be strong enough to go.") that is theirs - telling them they are on notice. Ideally and then NOT watch what happens after that.
 - Parents help the kids decide who they want to confront. Don't talk to that person right away (don't get caught up in revenge). Think through the what, when, where about this. No pressure to DO IT, just what you would do. Hypothetically to start.
 - Don't tell them "don't post because you will get in trouble, you will mess up chances into college, etc" - help them to understand why we don't post things that we will regret for human reasons
 - Compare this to the car - the vast majority of times you won't get into an accident and kids feel this way about the internet - normalize making mistakes but also help them to make better choices