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Teen suicides rise in tandem with cyberbullying – and advocates have had enough

Families and legislators have banded together to fight an scourge that is harming and even killing teenagers.

Facebook | Twitter | LinkedIn | YouTube | Instagram

TECHKNOLIB
Media & Tech Literacy

'Simply Put, It's Pornographic': This Shocking New Snapchat Channel Should Terrify Every Parent

By Patricia Williams | Parents

HEADLINES IN THE NEWS

Online Risk Exposure among Youth in the United States:

- 1 in 4: unwanted explicit content
- 1 in 9: victims of cyberbullying
- 1 in 11: unwanted sexual solicitations

(Crimes Against Children Research Center 2012)

Sextortion is the largest growing threat to teenagers online

Family | News | Tech News

by JIM MAYER | October 11, 2019

Special Report: Predators lurking on dangerous Apps and video games

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The Psychology of Fear

Shield Them from Risks . . . Protect Them!

Get the Situation under Control. . . Fix the Problem.

Their Future is at Stake!

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WE MUST PROTECT TEENS FROM ONLINE DANGERS!

- Emphasizes high-risk narratives instead of the everyday experiences of teens
 - A **dangerous epidemic** among our youth?
- A risk-adverse approach to online safety
 - Emphasizes an **abstinence-only** prevention
 - Equates all **risk exposure** to harm
 - Doesn't **empower youth** and teach teens how to protect themselves online

“As a society, we often spend so much time worrying about young people that we fail to account for how our paternalism and protectionism hinders teens’ ability to become informed, thoughtful, and engaged adults.” (boyd, *It’s Complicated: the Social Lives of Networked Teens*)

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A WEB-BASED DIARY STUDY OF 68 TEENS AND PARENTS

N = 209 Reports by Teens
N = 80 Reports by Parents

- **87%** of the risks reported during the diary study were coded as **low** to **medium** risk severity
- **84%** of the risk reports suggested that teens **did not intentionally seek out** online risk experiences
- **47%** of reports showed that teens took **active measures to cope**
 - Said “no” to unwanted advances, confronted the person who caused the issue, removed themselves from unwanted situations, fixed it themselves, or actively sought help
- **49%** of the reports were considered **resolved**
 - **17%** so **insignificant**, no resolution was necessary
- Experiences often gave teens the **opportunity to build important social skills**, such as boundary setting, problem solving, and empathy

Link to the Research: https://stirlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2016_Wisniewski_DearDiary.pdf

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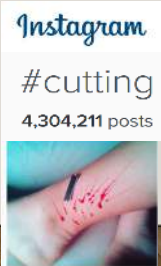
TEENS SEE MORE ONLINE THAN YOU THINK

*“Oh, hon. Its the ***internet***. Half of it is **porn** to start with. The other half is contaminated by **violent** material, **illegal** material, **depression**, **anxiety**, and **morally dubious** events by nature... It would really be a **miracle** if you managed to be on the internet without any exposure to it.”*

-15-year-old female

*“someone posted an instagram picture of **their scars**... I commented ‘**stay strong**,’ but **one comment will not save her life.**”*

-13-year-old female

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TEENS OFTEN SAID NO

“One of my old friends **asked for pictures** and **I said no**... I didn't want to send them, and I didn't give him any idea that I was going to. It was **random**.” -14-year-old female



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SOMETIMES, TEENS SAID YES

- “A **friend** of mine was feeling particularly **sexual**, and it showed in her **texts**. It's **not like I planned it**, but I certainly **wasn't opposed to it**.” -16-year-old male



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LESS OFTEN, IT GOT SERIOUS

"People [on] path and kik kept calling me a th** and a **liar**... It made me **want to kill myself**&?"
-14-year-old female



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PARENTS WERE MOSTLY IN THE DARK

- **Family Communication** regarding teens' online risks experiences was poor and created significant differences in perception between parents and teens.
 - **Less than 7%** of the risk reports matched between teens and parents
 - **38%** parent-teen pairs had no communication regarding online risks
 - **Parental Misperceptions**, as well as their actual responses, exacerbated the lack of communication, encouraging teens **not** to go to their parents when they experience online risks.

Link to the Research: https://stirlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2017_Wisniewski_ParentsJustDontUnderstand.pdf

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WHEN PARENTS WERE (RARELY) INVOLVED

- Parents used **active mediation** to talk about the situation with their teens
 - But, it often sounded a lot like a **lecture** instead . . . or punishment.

"I think it is **childish** and **ridiculous**. A waste of time. He is actually watching me type this, so **he knows** how I feel about it." -**Mother of 15-year-old male**



"The picture was not at all sexually suggestive. However, it **violated the rule** of NOT sending him any pictures." -**Mother of a 13-year-old female** (Matched Reports)

"I had to confess when she saw the KIK message... it was just a picture of **me smiling**... I am under **punishment** for 2 weeks - which i think is **excessive**" -**13-year-old female**

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WHY TEENS DON'T TELL

- It was "no big deal"

"I was **kiking** and out of no where he just sent me a picture of his **penis**. [Tell? Why?] i didnt tell my mom cause **it wasn't a big deal**. idk how my mom would have **acted** because i have **never told** her something like this." -**14-year-old female**

- Parents would just cause unnecessary awkwardness

"They would probably act like it was **unusual**, because **they aren't exposed to it** as much. They'd probably follow up on it and it would just be a **lot of unnecessary awkwardness** over a non-existent problem." -**17-year-old male**

- Because parents would overreact, punish them, or make things worse

"she would probably **make me come off** of that social network. . . i didn't or would tell her cause **i shouldn't be in trouble** of have to sacrifice my social network for **someone else** because they **made the wrong choice** or mistake." -**14-year-old female**

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AT THE END OF **TWO MONTHS**

- **Parents** reported significantly lower levels of **family communication** than in their **pre-surveys**
 - Though still significantly higher than their **teens'**

(Matched Reports)

"I realized that I have given my daughter **a lot of trust** online."

-Mother of 14-year-old female

"That my **parents don't really know** what I do online, no matter how much they really think that they do know." **-14-year-old female (matched)**

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This collaborative work was led by **Dr. Xinru Page** at BYU: https://stapl.cs.byu.edu/projects/autism_and_social_media/

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF 22 AUTISTIC YOUNG ADULTS, PARENTS, AND SUPPORT STAFF

LEVEL 2 SUPPORT NEEDS

- Engaged with **two organizations** providing services to **Level 2** Autistic Young Adults in the Northeastern U.S.
 - **Eight** Autistic Young Adults, **ten** Support Staff, and **four** Parents
- Studied benefits and risks of **social media use** through the lens of **Affordances**, or "**perceptions of how a given object/technology can or should be used.**"



Link to the Research: https://stirlab.org/wp-content/uploads/xinru_2022.pdf

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BENEFITS VERSUS DRAWBACKS OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR AUTISTIC YOUNG ADULTS

- The ability to **maintain existing relationships** through physical distance
- Reducing boredom and **pursuing special interests**
- Seeking **new relationships**
- Increased **anxiety** due to social expectations
- Online **harassment** and **social drama**
- **Oversharing** and **privacy concerns**

"I can contact family members [on Facebook] that live far from me. Family that I don't usually see. They live far. Too far for me to even go visit."

"I don't like it when people give negative comments or post something inappropriate. Something like really immature, something that is more like, insensitive or can consider be like a harassment in a way."

Link to the Research: https://xtirlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2020_Benefits_Challenges_Autism.pdf

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SOCIAL MEDIA SEEMS STRAIGHT FORWARD, RIGHT?

Friends

- Home
- Friend Requests
- Suggestions
- All friends
- Birthdays
- Custom Lists

7 mutual friends

Confirm

Delete

"I thought I was her friend, but she said, 'You're not because we don't know each other well enough.'" -Participant

They have "a hard time telling the difference between Facebook friend and real friend. So you're friends on Facebook, you're friends. When that's not really what it is." -Staff

"I've got clients that are writing horrible threats to... They're going onto Facebook at night and, 'I hate my job,' and, 'I hate this person.'" - Staff



What's on your mind, Pamela?


Live video

Photo/video

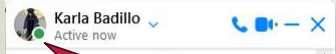
Feeling/activity

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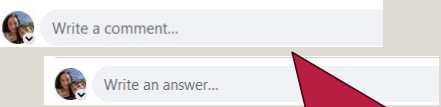
SOCIAL MEDIA IS FULL OF CONFUSING SOCIAL CUES



"I had to do that [share my phone number] because when I made my account it said phone number or email."
-Participant



"Well why hasn't this person responded?" – Participant




"Oh, this is my girlfriend," and he would show us an online account of someone that looked like a model and seemed very false... it was definitely really difficult for him to kind of process that just because someone posted that picture doesn't mean that's what they really look like." – Staff

"Sometimes people... come back on and say, 'Why did you message me so many times?' And then... it's awkward, it's like, 'I don't know what to say to this.'" – Participant


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YOUNG AUTISTIC ADULTS PERCEIVE AFFORDANCES DIFFERENTLY




Sharing Content

- Assume single audience
- Assume single purpose
- Oversharing information about others
- Sharing as prompted




Consuming Content

- Addictive consumption
- Trusting at face value
- Visceral reaction to emotional content



Connecting with Others

- Maintaining positive relationships
- Interpreting "Friendship" literally
- Expectations about access
- Rule-based boundaries



Networked Interactions

- Enabling social engagement
- Expecting immediate responses
- Overly direct
- Difficulty interpreting intentions of others

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HOW PARENTS AND SUPPORT STAFF MEDIATED SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR AUTISTIC YOUNG ADULTS

LEVEL 2 SUPPORT NEEDS

- **Strategies Used**
 - Restricted technology access
 - Informal advice and feedback
 - Formal training and curriculum
 - Monitoring and parental control software
- **Benefits and Drawbacks of Mediation**
 - Requests for “**joint troubleshooting**” helped reinforce appropriate social behaviors
 - Mediation provided direct support for **emotional co-regulation**
 - Perceived **punishment** led to Autistic youth going into “defense mode” and hiding their online behaviors
 - **Oversharing** social media drama with staff raised safety concerns
 - Overall, we saw an **overreliance** on support networks instead of developing problem-solving and self-regulation skills

Research publication forthcoming. . .

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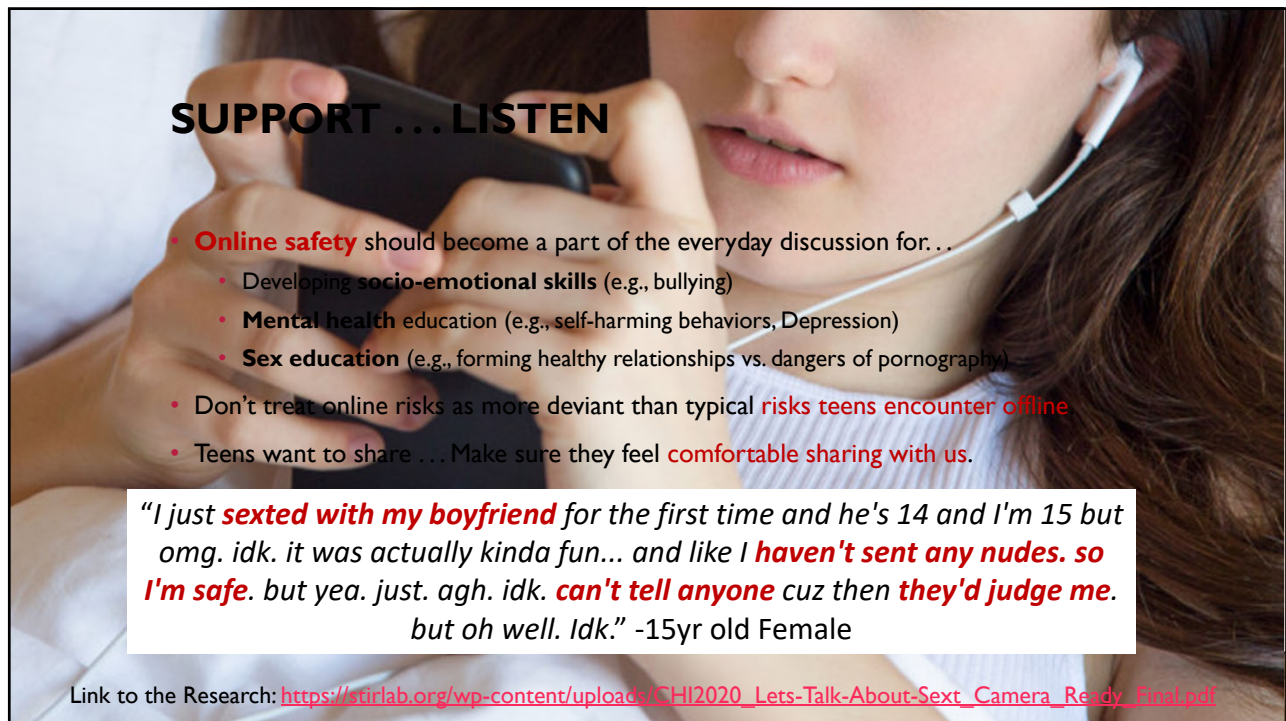
SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?

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ONLINE SAFETY AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS

- Set up **parental controls** when you first give your child access to technology (~Ages 8-12)
- **Teach** them how to navigate potentially risky situations. Focus on risk **coping skills** for managing risks. Give them **exit strategies**. (~Ages 8-14)
- **Trust** your teen to make **good decisions** on their own. Set clear **boundaries**. Let them know **you are there to help** if they need you. (~Ages 15-18)
 - Deep breaths... **Withhold judgment**.



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GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING "THE RIGHT" PARENTAL CONTROL APP

- **Make sure the app is not overly restrictive** ... It gives teens the ability to negotiate with their parents or take calculated risks.
- **Make sure the app considers your teen's privacy** ... It isn't healthy for you to know the intimate details of every conversation.
- **Make sure the app facilitates open communication and trust** ... If the app fundamentally hurts your relationship with your teen, then it isn't worth it.
- **Make teens part of the decision** ... Buy-in matters. Encourage them to self-regulate their own behaviors and install an app that they feel is beneficial to their goals.
- **Don't be fooled** ... No parental control app can guarantee that your teen will be safe online. Teach them strategies, so that they know how to protect themselves.

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Overly Restrictive (35%): “This app **sucks**. Parents if you really want your kids to hide more things from you and be more **rebellious** then get them to down load this app. Because they will become more **defiant** the more you restrict them and they will **make your life a living hell** because your **overprotective**.”

–One Star, Mobile Fence Parental Control, 2015

N = 736 Google Play App Reviews
76% of Reviews were negative
 (Ghosh et al. 2018)

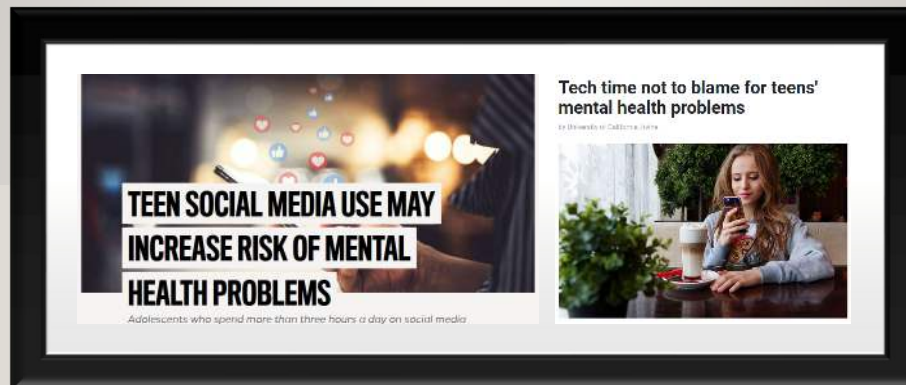
Privacy-Invasive (23%): “This **totally takes ALL my privacy away**. I can't even talk to my biological dad, or my boyfriend, or best friend with out being **stalked** by my mom.” –

One Star, SecureTeen Parental Control, 2015

Harms Parental Relationships (14%): “This app will cause **trust issues** with your kids. Ever since my dad installed this app, he and I have **grown farther apart**. If he doesn't trust me enough to use my phone, then **why should I trust him?**” –One Star, SecureTeen Parental Control, 2015

Link to the Research: https://stirlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018_Ghosh_SafetyVSSurveillance.pdf

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RESIST **FEAR-BASED** NARRATIVES

“It may be time for adults to **stop arguing** over whether smartphones and social media are good or bad for teens' mental health and start figuring out **ways to best support** them in both their **offline and online** lives,” –Dr. Candice Odgers, UC Irvine

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ADOLESCENT ONLINE SAFETY RESEARCH



"**IIP:PFI-RP**: Using a Human-Centered Approach to Improve Algorithms for Detecting Online Risks" ([#1827700](#), 9/2018-9/2021, **\$766,000**)

"**CAREER**: Safety by Design: Protecting Adolescents from Online Risks" ([#1844881](#), 4/2019-3/2024 **\$550,000**)

"**EAGER:CHS**: Examining Self-Harm and Suicide Contagion Risks of Viral Social Media Challenges on Youth and Young Adults" ([#1832904](#), 4/2018 – 4/2019, **\$58,053**).



Early Career Scholars Grant: "Reducing Digital Inequality by Empowering At-Risk Youth to be Resilient against Online Sexual Predation Risks" (7/2018-6/2023, **\$350,000**)

Seed Grant: "Online Social Support for Young People with Mental Health Problems: Discovering What Works" (2018-2020, **\$15,000**)

Seed Grant: "Robustly Quantifying Parental Monitoring and Support in the Digital Age" (2018-2020, **\$15,000**)



Any opinion, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of our sponsors.

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THANK YOU. QUESTIONS?

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Socio-Technical Interaction Research (STIR) Lab: <http://www.stirlab.org>

Read More at: <https://stirlab.org/adolescent-online-safety/>

And at: https://stapl.cs.byu.edu/projects/autism_and_social_media/



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