



Digital Media

Tips for
parents of
11 to 16 year
olds

Englisch

Die Stellen für **Suchtprävention**
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Dear Parents/ Guardians



«Is my child on their phone too much?»
«How do I establish boundaries without constantly fighting?»
«When should I be worried?»

You have probably asked yourself these questions. There are no easy answers. Digital media are a challenge for everyone.

Adolescents need guidance

The brain is still developing during adolescence. Adolescents are heavily influenced by desire and curiosity. They aren't skilled yet at thinking ahead and controlling themselves. The risks of digital media are therefore higher for adolescents, and this is why they need guidance from adults. We would like to share a few ideas on this with you.



There are benefits to digital media ...

There are positives to digital media. For example:

- Entertainment and relaxation
- Creative expression and creativity
- Trying out different roles
- Social contact
- Connecting with like-minded people
- Learning new things that may also be important for school and work

Digital media show adolescents that they can do something and that they belong. That can strengthen them as individuals.



Digital media offer adolescents an array of chances and opportunities. That's why they are so captivating.

... and risks

We discuss the risks in detail below. Talk to your child about them, so they understand why rules are needed.

- Find a quiet time to talk to them about one or two risks that are particularly important for your child. Ask them what they think about it.
- Don't discuss all the possible risks at once. That might cause resistance. You can address further topics another time.

Distraction

Social media are intentionally¹ designed to make us reach for our devices as often as possible and keep us online for long periods of time. That is extremely distracting, especially at times when we should be learning.

Sleep disturbances

Studies clearly show that those who use digital media in the late evening or at night have poorer quality or not enough sleep. That is bad for mental health and learning capacity.

Poor self-image

Images on social media are often «improved» with filters and usually only success stories are shared. Such images can make adolescents feel unattractive and that their own life is boring. This can have a negative effect on their mental health.

Bullying and mobbing²

Cyberbullying and mobbing can be particularly troublesome, because it usually continues when your child comes home from school.

Increase of self-endangering behaviour

Extreme content is often shown on social media, because it keeps you online for longer periods of time. Examples include self-harm, eating disorders, drug taking or suicidal thoughts. This content can harm the viewer's own mood and increase the risk of self-endangering behaviour.

¹ Social media platforms earn their money from advertisements. The longer you're online, the more advertising you will see. Social media platforms invest huge sums of money in finding the next trick to keep us on our devices for longer.

² 38% of 12 to 19 year olds have already experienced false or insulting things being said about them in chats (JAMES study, 2022).

False information and extreme views

Social media content is not monitored enough. A lot of false information is disseminated by people and organisations who seek to influence others. Fake news and views spread faster on social media than the truth. This is because extreme content is shown more often to keep people online for longer.

One-sided view of the world

Social media platforms usually only show content that is similar to previous interests.

Addiction risk

Some games work like gambling games, with, for example, a «treasure chest» to open and the possibility of winning a prize. That can be addictive. Social media can also cause problematic consumer behaviour³, because they are optimised to grab attention.

Cost traps

In-app purchases can lead to debts.

Fraud and harassment⁴

Dangerous or fraudulent people can be lurking online, and sexual harassment is another threat too.

Criminal offences

Anyone who offends others, downloads or shares images of a sexual or violent nature, or who uses the intellectual property (music, images etc.) of others (copyright) is liable to prosecution.



You, the parents, play an important role in equipping young people with the tools to handle the risks.

³ Approximately 7% of 11 to 15 year olds show problematic use of social networks. Just under 3% of 14 and 15 year olds show problematic gaming behaviour (HBSC, 2022).

⁴ Almost half of adolescents have been approached online by a stranger with unwanted sexual advances (JAMES study, 2022).



What can be done?

Emphasise the positive

Many families often fight about digital media. To improve the mood, also mention the positives. This will help make adolescents feel they are being taken seriously.



«I'm impressed how much you're learning with this app.»
«I'm pleased you've found like-minded people online.»

Show an interest

Ask about your child's experience with social media and what they think about it. Let them explain some apps to you.

Offer help

Tell them that you are always there if they have any questions or concerns. Act if something doesn't feel right for you.

Ensure your child enjoys enough free time without screen time

Experiences in the non-digital world are very important for adolescents. Physical exercise and interacting with peers in person will help improve mental health.



«If you see or experience something that makes you uncomfortable, please come to me. I know there are lots of strange things online. It's not your fault if you come across something you don't like.»

Be informed

Before you allow a device, app, game or film, research what it is and whether it is suitable for your child – e.g. find information online or ask other parents. Observe age recommendations. Ask your child why they want it and what they know about it.

Don't allow everything all at once

Smartphones give children access to all possible kinds of applications and content. Use of social media can be particularly overwhelming for 11 and 12 year olds. Therefore, allow access to apps and social media gradually.⁵

Use the available technology

Supervise the use of technology closely at the start. Also make use of the technical tools available, e.g. making sure apps can't be downloaded without your permission. See reverse side for instructions.

Set an example

Adolescents watch their parents and learn from their behaviour. Shared screen-free time helps many families to find a good balance.

Get support

Are you worried about your child?
Are you wondering how to protect them?
Talk to friends, relatives or professionals.
Accepting help is a sign of strength.

Agree on rules

Rules protect against the risks and provide guidance. If possible, try to draw up the rules together. You can find tips for this on the following pages.

⁵ For example, only SMS or chat apps like Threema to start with. And only allow apps with freely accessible (and also problematic) content, such as Instagram, Snapchat or TikTok, when your child is in later adolescence.

Agreeing on rules and following through with them

Make agreements on:

Fairness

Talk to your child about the importance of a respectful online presence. A guiding principle for everyone might be:

- «We don't speak badly of others and we don't spread rumours.»
- «We never say negative things to someone online, only in a personal discussion. That way we stay respectful.»

Settings

Many apps try to get our attention with notifications. The following can help against this:

- Turning off or limiting notifications
- Putting the device on silent

Content

Observe age recommendations for apps, games and films.

Allow use of apps only gradually.

Duration, time and place

Experts agree: adolescents should not use electronic devices before bed and shouldn't have them in their room at night. Mental health suffers otherwise.

In addition, the duration, time and place of use should always be re-determined as appropriate. The following ideas may help:

- Screen-free times and places (ideally for the whole family) – for example, during conversations, when eating at the table, in the children's room, before breakfast, on Sunday morning, etc.
- More free time spent without a screen than with a screen
- Maximum usage times for devices, whereby the duration of use can be controlled (e.g. game consoles)



- Rules should apply to you as well as your child.
- The younger the child, the less screen time and fewer the apps they should have, and the more control you should have.
- Rules should always be renegotiated after a certain time. That's normal because adolescents are continually growing.

If trying to enforce a rule causes conflict, keep calm and say:



«We have this rule to protect you from risks. Not to annoy you.»

Warning signs



«Should I be worried?»

Most of the following warning signs are seen in all adolescents at some point. If your child is displaying a lot of the signs, it's worth taking a closer look.

Possible warning signs

- Heavy mood swings, listlessness
- Recent severe withdrawal and evasion
- Loss of interest in and enjoyment from hobbies
- Change or loss of friendships
- Poorer performance at school
- Altered sleep
- Frequent sadness
- Frequent aggression
- Frequent money worries
- Increased media consumption to switch off

Many things can be a burden for young people, not just media. Try to talk to your child and with other close family or friends. If you are unsure, seek advice. Useful addresses are provided on the right.



«You seem sad recently. Do you want to tell me what's on your mind?»



Advice centres



«What should I expect if I call an advice centre?»

You can be sure that whatever you are worried about, other parents have similar questions. Getting help is always a sign of strength. The professionals at the advice centres are experienced and understand your problems. Your conversations are confidential. Sometimes a simple telephone call can help. Advice is free from these centres.



Parental advice in the Canton of Zurich

- [elternnotruf.ch](https://www.elternnotruf.ch)
24hour helpline:
0848 35 45 55
- Cantonal child and adolescent centres: [zh.ch/kjz](https://www.zh.ch/kjz)
- The adolescent advice centres provide advice to parents as well: [jugendberatung.me](https://www.jugendberatung.me)
- Regional addiction prevention centre:
[suchtpraevention-zh.ch/kontakt](https://www.suchtpraevention-zh.ch/kontakt)

Advice for adolescents

- 24 hours a day, anonymous, free of charge: [147.ch](https://www.147.ch) and tel. 147
- Adolescent advice centres: [jugendberatung.me](https://www.jugendberatung.me)
- Addiction advice: [safezone.ch](https://www.safezone.ch)

Useful tools and further information

[medien-kindersicher.de](https://www.medien-kindersicher.de)

Step-by-step instructions for technical protection tools and parental settings

[jugendundmedien.ch](https://www.jugendundmedien.ch)

The comprehensive Swiss platform on the topic. With recommendations, concrete tips and lots of useful information

[mediennutzungsvertrag.de](https://www.mediennutzungsvertrag.de)

Template for a media usage contract

[spieleratgeber-nrw.de](https://www.spieleratgeber-nrw.de)

Gaming advisers

[thesocialdilemma.com](https://www.thesocialdilemma.com)

The film «Das Dilemma mit den sozialen Medien» (The Social Dilemma) shows in a clear and understandable way the techniques used by social media to get our attention. You can watch the film – together with your adolescent child – with a trial Netflix subscription.

[zh.feel-ok.ch/webprofi-os-test](https://www.zh.feel-ok.ch/webprofi-os-test)

Self-test for adolescents on online consumption

This brochure is available in numerous other languages

Download and order for free (ZH):
[suchtprevention-zh.ch/infomaterial](https://www.suchtprevention-zh.ch/infomaterial)



Flyer on the topic in simple language:

[jugendundmedien.ch/angeboteberatung/bestellung-publikationen](https://www.jugendundmedien.ch/angeboteberatung/bestellung-publikationen)