

## Minimizing and Monitoring: A How-To Guide on Monitoring your Teens' Social Media & Smartphone Usage

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**Guest Post: Dr. Lisa Strohman, JD, PhD**  
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*This guest post was written by Dr. Lisa Strohman, the founder and director of the Technology Wellness Center, one of the first organizations to address the global issue of technology addiction and overuse. A licensed clinical psychologist, Dr. Strohman has spent more than a decade working with individual, family, and adolescent clients struggling with issues including depression, anxiety and addiction. She, along with Technology Well Center co-founder Dr. Melissa Westendorf, co-authored the upcoming book *Unplugged: What everyone needs to know about raising kids in a technology addicted world.**

As a psychologist who specializes in technology addiction, I am all too aware of the conflicts between parents and teens, which are increasingly related to technology use.

In 2010, there was a comprehensive study conducted by the [Kaiser Foundation](#) that reported data from three separate research studies (1999, 2004, and 2009) on the technology use of eight to 18-year-olds. Although research on technology lags behind the release of the actual technology, nearly five years ago (a lifetime in the technology industry) kids ages eight to 18 were averaging more than seven hours a day of technology time (cell phones, web, social media, video games, television) and nearly 11 hours when you account for media multi-tasking. Unfortunately, technology use among teens has only increased in the last five years.

An article published in [eMarketer](#) in 2014 estimated that nearly 88 percent of teens aged 12-17 will own a phone, and over 80 percent of those would access the Internet that year. As they get older, 96.5 percent of those ages 18 to 24 were expected to have cell phones and over 90 percent were expected to use them to regularly access the Internet. A new study released by [Pew Research Center](#) reported that more than half of teens (56 percent) go online several times a day, and that 24 percent are online "almost constantly." With almost constant access to the Internet, they are online via their mobile devices without restriction, communicating via text and social media platforms.

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This new form of communication, which utilizes smart phones and social media platforms, is a marketers' dream come true. It is important to remember that although the Internet is an amazing resource for information and access, it's also a marketing platform.



Online there are no secrets, no privacy, and no mercy

Online there are no secrets, no privacy and no mercy for anyone that doesn't actively shield themselves from the marketers, data miners or hackers. Based on my experience with patients, I feel that few people understand the true meaning of this loss of privacy. Most of us don't think about what this really means or the implications it has on teens' future decisions.

Teens who are currently applying for college are being screened and judged by what they are posting on their social media accounts. In 2013, Kaplan carried out a study that reported 31 percent of admissions officers used social media as a screening tool, looking for signs of alcohol use, posts on partying, bullying behavior etc. This is just one reason we need to educate our teens about the importance of monitoring their technology usage, which leads me to my next point.



The Importance of Minimizing & Monitoring

## The Importance of Minimizing & Monitoring

Not having a solid understanding of what the Internet is and how it can impact our teens negatively is only one issue. Parents need to be able to recognize the signs of technology-related issues in their teens. At [Technology Wellness Center](#), we developed the Technology Use Continuum (TUC©) to assess the four main areas that are impacted by technology overuse: Emotional, Behavioral, Physical and Interpersonal. Each of these four areas are unique to child development and can be impacted in different ways by technology overuse. Creating the TUC© for parents has allowed us to assess and then treat with a specificity to the needs of each family that comes through our program.

## What you can do as a parent

Parents aren't following the same rules that they set for their teens. Teens are paying attention and they watch the amount of time and energy that adults around them are putting into technology. The difference is, as adults, we have fully functioning frontal cortexes to make complex decisions. We also have a better understanding of the world's nefarious side that kids don't necessarily need to be introduced to. To help our teens manage technology successfully, we must be consistent with our message and set clear boundaries.

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"My friend told me about this great site that helps her keep track of her daughter's cell phone and website activity. TeenSafe is such a great resource!"



"I know my child may not always make the best decisions. With TeenSafe, I have another way to help with decisions that I may not have otherwise known about."

- **Communicate.** This is a must for parents raising kids today. Have age-appropriate and casual talks with your kids on the risks of time online. Make sure the communication lines are always open.
- **Maintain Awareness.** Parents should maintain awareness of their teen's time online and know all passwords for their teen's social media accounts and devices so they have full access at any given moment.
- **Disconnect by example.** Teens learn from what parents do. Maintain examples of being disconnected, i.e. spending time outdoors and reading, instead of watching T.V.
- **Don't assume.** Don't love your teens enough to provide excuses or underestimate their ability to deceive you about their technology use.

#### Set basic ground rules

- Set time limits
- No television, gaming devices, phones or tablets in bedroom
- Establish age appropriate rules
- Use tools to monitor mobile device usage
- Agree on mobile device rules with contract
- Have your teen sign a mobile device rules contract



Implement a Monitoring Tool

### Implement a monitoring tool

If you are going to allow your kids online access (and let's be honest everyone does) then you will need to find a reasonable approach to monitor their activity. One such way is through monitoring tools such as TeenSafe. TeenSafe has an amazing tool that allows parents to view texts (even deleted ones), calls, see the location of the phone and even monitor social media activity. Other features include access to information exchanged on apps such as Kik Messenger and WhatsApp, while allowing you to see your teens' search history on the web and view their contacts.

TeenSafe's message and monitoring tool is about safeguarding our most precious and valued asset: our children.

Although teens tend to know more about the ins and outs of technology than their parents, they aren't always aware of the dangers technology can introduce. It is our job as parents and guardians to provide limits and ensure their safety. Teach them how to maintain balance, be consistent with the rules and be a good role model in your own technology use.

Technology is ubiquitous. It's part of our daily routine; although I accept this, and would not be able to impart my knowledge and expertise without it, I won't accept it becoming bigger than we are as a society. There is a quote from the Chippewa tribe that reads: "I do not think the measure of a civilization is how tall its buildings of concrete are, but rather how well its people have learned to relate to their environment and fellow man." To relate to one another, we need to disconnect from our devices, look at the people around us and create real human connections.