

UNDERSTANDING ONLINE ADDICTION IN KIDS AND TEENS

Online addiction affects kids and teens and can manifest through excessive use of digital platforms. Recognizing this addiction is crucial for parents and trusted adults to support healthy online habits.

According to the American Psychological Association, internet addiction is, “a behavioral pattern characterized by excessive or obsessive online and offline computer use that leads to distress and impairment.” This can include excessive gaming, sexual preoccupations, and e-mail and text messaging¹.

75-80%

of parents worry about the excessive use of, mental health effects of and inappropriate content through [digital technology]². **Excessive screen time can impact mental health and increase anxiety and depression³.**

1 in 5

children use devices for comfort, during mealtimes or to fall asleep².

17%

of parents say their child uses a mobile device to calm down when upset, indicating that their device is **playing a role in their emotional regulation².**

*These findings highlight the need for families to **monitor and manage their children's screen time** to protect their well-being and help them develop healthier emotional regulation strategies.*

Warning Signs2Identify

Compulsive checking: A strong urge to frequently check social media.

Extended Usage: Spending significant amounts of time on social platforms and hyper-focused on the online environment.

Reduced Offline Engagement: Decreased participation in non-digital activities and withdrawing from real-world friends.

Mood Fluctuations: Noticeable mood changes, especially when not using social media.

Withdrawal Symptoms: Experiencing discomfort or anxiety when unable to access social media.

Increased Conflict: Arguments or tension arising from social media use. Vague answers regarding online behaviors and actions.

Steps2Take

Have open and honest conversations with your kids and teens about what they are doing online, it can make all the difference. Check out Know2Protect's Have the Talk resource: bit.ly/3Fckinw.

Understand what your child is doing online by participating in their digital activities, but don't forget to balance it with meaningful offline moments, too.

Encourage kids' success by rewarding them with non-digital incentives, such as a special treat, extra playtime, a favorite book or activity.

Lead by example in setting digital boundaries, like device-free mealtimes. Use Know2Protect's Family Online Safety Agreement as a place to start: bit.ly/3ZkymLE.

¹ dictionary.apa.org/internet-addiction

² commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/research/report/2025-common-sense-census-web-2.pdf

³ pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10852174/pdf/JEHP-12-413.pdf.