

Raising Resilient Teens: What Parents Can Do to Support Adolescent Well-Being



Findings from a long-term study of adolescent health highlight actions caregivers can take to support their child's well-being.

What is the ABCD Study?

The Adolescent Brain Cognitive DevelopmentSM (ABCD) Study is the largest long-term study of brain development and child health in the United States. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded leading researchers in the fields of adolescent development and neuroscience to conduct this ambitious project. The ABCD Study[®] has 21 research sites across the country, which have recruited 11,880 participants, starting when youth were 9 or 10 years old. Researchers are following their development through adolescence and into young adulthood. Most study participants are now 17 and 18 years old. The ABCD Study covers many experiences and behaviors that impact youth well-being, including screen use and substance use.

Within families, different dynamics may shape how teens engage with media. For example, research showed that parents' own screen use habits were linked to more mature video game and movie consumption among their teens. Another study found that family conflict was linked to more time spent on YouTube, movies, TV shows, and video games.



All screen use is not the same. How youth use screens and what's on them matters. When screen use interferes with daily life, it may raise the risk of mental health challenges.

What We Know About Screens

Screen use includes texting, video gaming, using social media, and watching videos or movies. These results are correlational, meaning they show associations but not cause-and-effect relationships.

Preteens and teens who spent more time on screens outside of school experienced:

- Slightly worse mental health
- A harder time falling asleep and less overall sleep
- Greater alcohol, nicotine, and cannabis experimentation
- Less physical activity



However, screen use is not always associated with negative behaviors. Preteens and teens who spent more time on screens outside of school also reported a greater number of close friends than preteens and teens who spent less time on screens. Another study found that playing video games was linked to increases in problem-solving, flexible thinking, and recalling facts and skills.

Screens: What Can Families Do?



- > Talk with teens about when and how they are using screens.
- > Ask about what teens watch and play.
- > Limit screen use during meals and at bedtime.
- > Encourage turning off phone ringers at night.
- > Avoid using screen time limits as a punishment.
- > Demonstrate balanced screen use with your own habits.



What We Know About Substance Use

Teens' brains are still developing, so alcohol, nicotine, and other substances may have greater effects on them than on adults.

Youth who seek out thrilling activities and who have difficulty controlling their actions and reactions may be more likely to use substances.

Substance Use: What Can Families Do?



- › Ask about whom teens are hanging out with and where they are when not at home. Talk with other parents about access to substances in their homes.
- › Set clear family rules about whether teens can consume alcohol and what happens if they do.
- › Limit teens' access to alcohol (even a sip) at home. Consider locked cabinets or storing alcohol outside the home.
- › Discuss the health risks from substance use.
- › Help youth feel supported at school and at home.

Youth whose peers or families use nicotine or tobacco products may be at heightened risk of using nicotine or tobacco products themselves. More time online socializing in the preteen years may increase risk of experimenting with substances.

The World Around Teens Makes a Difference

While parents can do a lot to support their children, resources available to families and the communities where they live can also affect teen well-being.

For example:

- Access to green space—like parks—in a child's community can support their brain development.
- While youth from families with fewer economic resources tended to show greater impulsivity and mental health challenges, they also demonstrated resilience, with smaller increases in mental health problems over time compared to youth from wealthier families. Some researchers suggest that they may develop stronger coping skills.
- State social safety net resources like food assistance, cash assistance, and health coverage for low-income families helped reduce the impact of poverty on youth mental health and brain development.



Questions Scientists Have for Future Research

- How do screen use and other behaviors impact mental health? How does mental health impact screen use? Where is the line for 'too much' screen use?
- How can parents help teens avoid substance use and unhealthy screen use?
- What can educators, health professionals, and policymakers do to support teens' mental health?



These studies show youth experiences with screen and substance use. They don't show if or how one thing causes another and if these relationships differ between different groups of people. These studies included data from participants when they were 9 to 15 years old. Many things could affect these findings, which may also change over time. More research is needed to know for sure.

News Articles



- 7 Tips for Managing Screen Use ([NIH MedlinePlus Magazine](#))
- Research Reveals Teen Drinking Risk Factors ([Mirage News](#))
- Brain Scans Shed Light on How Green Space Might Support Children's Cognitive Development ([PsyPost](#))
- Just 15 Extra Minutes of Sleep Boosts Teen Brains ([SciTech Daily](#))
- The 5 Cs of Media Use ([American Academy of Pediatrics](#))



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