# Screen Time and Technology: How much is too much?



Youth today are immersed in a digital world.  Smartphones, the internet, social networks and gaming draw youth of all ages into the ever-growing online world of communication and entertainment.  According to a study by Pew Research Institute:

- 95% of all teens have access to a smart phone.
- 45% of teens say they are online "almost constantly".
- YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are the most popular online platforms amongst teens ages 13-17.
- The average teenager has 18-24 apps on their phones.
- 90% of teens say they play video games of any kind (whether on a computer, game console or cellphone).

Additionally, many of our schools are tapping into the technology of electronic devices for educational tools.  The internet has opened doors to avenues of learning that include online research, assignments, tests and digital presentations and projects.  There is no doubt that technology comes with many benefits but it also comes with risks.  As technology advances and accessing electronic devices becomes more necessary for children and teens, knowing how much is too much can be challenging for parents and educators.

 Adults can help prevent excessive screen time and over use of technology by guiding children and teens to find a healthy balance.  Just as we spend time teaching our kids how to ride a bike or drive a car, we also need to teach them the rules of safe social media, internet use, electronic communication and gaming.  This is a new reality for educators and parents alike.  Helping youth develop a healthy balance of screen time without using technology as an escape from real world challenges, emotions and socialization can be challenging.  So how much is too much?

A healthy allotment of screen time is one that doesn't disrupt developmentally important parts of a child/adolescent's life including:

- Seeing friends and interacting with them in real life
- Participating in extracurricular activities they're excited about
- Keeping up with academic classes and doing homework
- Building positive relationships with family members
- Getting enough sleep

Without adult guidance, it can be easy for kids and teens to let their electronic use get out of control. Parents can positively influence children by educating youth about healthy screen time and technology use.  Do your research and engage in regular conversations about phone use, apps, social media and gaming.  Other strategies include:

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- Creating "technology free zones"- the dining room can be a great place to establish a technology free zone, reserved for meals and family conversation.  For children, keeping electronics out of bedrooms is also recommended to improve sleep habits.
- Establish times to unplug- meal times, an hour before bed, during family activities, etc.
- Role model healthy habits- youth often learn more by what you do than what you say. Parents can teach youth to create healthy habits by monitoring their own use and screen-time behaviors.
- Encourage physical activity- Help your children/teens find physical activities that they enjoy that enforce time away from their screens.

For additional tips on developing healthy technology use, tap into the resources below:

- https://www.commonsensemedia.org/

-  http://www.connectsafely.org/

- http://www.cyberwise.org/

- https://cyberbullying.org

References: The American Academy of Pediatrics; www.cyberwise.org; www.commonsensemedia.org; www.connectsafely.org; Pew Research Institute

# National PTA's Healthy Lifestyle Month

Did you know the National PTA (Parent Teacher Association) has a network with millions of teachers, administrators, families, and students that strives to help kids become more successful academically in school?

The PTA first began as the National Congress of Mothers. Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst were the co-founding moms who wanted to protect kids from dangerous working and unsanitary living conditions.

The National PTA's "Healthy Lifestyles Month", which focuses on physical health (exercise and diet), was one initiative that sprouted from those early day concerns.

According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) as well as other well documented research, we know that kids who develop and practice healthy eating and exercise habits are more likely to be successful academically in school. Furthermore, we also know through research and studies that poor physical health leads to an increased risk of developing mental health problems.

Often, adults and kids see physical health as something separate from mental health but the two should be thought of as two parts that make a whole. Just as poor physical health can lead to an increased risk of developing mental health problems, poor mental health can have a negative impact on our physical health.

Kids spend so much time in school each day that it's important to make sure we provide them with healthy food choices as well as plenty of opportunities throughout the day for physical activity and exercise. This can be hard to do at times as we all seem to live in a fast-paced world where fast food and/or processed meals are more the norm both inside and outside of school. And those "Once Upon a Time" days, where kids loved being outside playing and exercising before, during and after school seem to occur less and less, as the digital and gaming world seems to fill more and more of a kid's "free time" in and out of school.

The digital world is not going to disappear any time soon so we do need to actively inspire and encourage kids to put down and shut off the digital devices.

With that being said, we need to find activities that encourage and help kids stay physically active. The National PTA's Healthy Lifestyles theme for this year is "Get Off Your Apps."

Parents and schools can encourage and challenge kids to disconnect more from their devices and connect more with family and friends through active play, family time at home and physical education programs and activities at school.

**Ideas for Parents:**

- Go on a bike ride or hiking.  Whether you choose to stroll through your neighborhood or hit some nature or city trails, be sure to connect with your kids by talking with them or by creating an activity.  For example, encourage your kids to name the types of trees or birds along the trail.  Kids want to interact and learn.

- Have kids help with chores that require them to move, such as mowing the lawn or raking up leaves.  Reward them with a more relaxed family time, such as a family movie night in or out of the house.

- Go a step further and invite families in the neighborhood to participate by having a neighborhood fun night where kids and adults play games together, such as volleyball or a game of basketball ("Horse," etc.) either family vs. family or kids vs. parents.  Include a healthy meal, snacks and drinks.

- Have a Neighborhood Scavenger Hunt where motorized vehicles are not allowed to be used to go from place to place to find items or clues.

**Ideas for Schools:**

- Hold a steps program where kids can track the number of steps they take throughout the day.  Working with teacher and administration guidance, allow kids to set up a rewards system.

- Organize teachers vs. students activities such as games (basketball, volleyball etc.) or less formal activities like walking/steps, jump roping etc.

- Have a scavenger hunt inside and outside (on school property) that incorporates classroom skills as well as physical activity.

    Just remember, whatever you do, keep it age appropriate, fun and healthy!

*https://www.pta.org › home › programs › Celebrate-Healthy-Lifestyles*

https://nationaldaycalendar.com › pta-healthy-lifestyles-month-november

https://nationaltoday.com › Months

*https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk › a-to-z › physical-health-and-mental-health*

# Methamphetamines on the Rise in Nebraska

Methamphetamine had nearly dropped off the radar when opioid overdoses skyrocketed in 2016 and 2017. Now methamphetamine use is on the rise, particularly in Nebraska.

A recent report by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics found that fatal overdoses involving stimulants rose 37% between 2016 and 2017. Fentanyl was the highest at 38%, followed by heroin at 22%, cocaine at 21% and methamphetamine at 13%. The CDC also found that the drug of choice varied based on geographic location. Fentanyl is more likely to be involved in a fatal overdose in the eastern part of the United States. Methamphetamine is more likely to be involved in states west of the Mississippi River, like Nebraska, South Dakota, Colorado, Wyoming etc. Methamphetamine use had dipped over 10 years ago when lawmakers put restrictions on the purchase of over-the-counter decongestant pseudoephedrine, like Sudafed, which is an ingredient used to make methamphetamine. However, methamphetamine is back and wreaking havoc in Nebraska (NPR).

The Omaha Division of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) saw a 31% increase in meth seizes between 2018 and 2019 (Fox 42 KPTM). Methamphetamine is more likely to be found in rural areas of Nebraska than in urban areas. Methamphetamine is primarily making its way into Nebraska via our interstate system and highways, but it can also be sent through the mail. In Nebraska, methamphetamine is involved in more child welfare cases than any other substance and contributes to many violent and property crimes (Omaha World Herald).

Methamphetamine, or meth, is a highly addictive stimulant that effects the central nervous system and is also known as crystal, meth, ice and speed. Meth looks like fragments of glass, cloudy crystal or bluish white rocks. Users smoke, snort or swallow meth. They may also soak meth in a liquid and inject it into the body. The high that a user achieves from using meth occurs almost immediately after use and can last for several hours, which makes it very appealing to users. Users then experience a crash, causing them to experience unpleasant feelings like depression and fatigue. These unpleasant feelings often motivate the person to use more meth to counteract the feelings (National Institute on Drug Abuse).

Short term effects of meth use are increased wakefulness, decreased appetite, rapid heart rate and high blood pressure.  Long term effects include addiction, weight loss, dental issues, skin sores from intense itching, anxiety, sleeping problems and changes in behavior. Meth can cause changes to the brain, which can impact coordination and one's ability to learn.  Furthermore, meth can also alter the areas of the brain that involve emotions and memory. Long-term users may also experience paranoia and hallucinations.

Meth is made from house products like paint thinner and cleaners, batteries and over-the-counter cold medicines. The combination of these materials can be extremely dangerous. Fortunately, law enforcement officers are not finding meth labs like they were in the early 2000's. Meth is now primarily being produced in Mexico. The methamphetamine that is coming into the US is over 90% potency and it is significantly cheaper than it was in the early 2000's. A combination of low cost, high potency and a high lasting for 4 to 12 hours, makes meth very attractive to users.

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According to the Youth Risk and Behavior Survey, meth use by high school students was only 3% in 2017 compared to 6.3% in 2005. It is important to keep in mind that meth users do not typically start using meth first. They begin abusing other drugs, like prescription medications and marijuana, then move to meth in an attempt to get a longer lasting, more intense high that they cannot achieve with other drugs. General education and awareness can help prevent youth from using drugs of any kind. Parental engagement and involvement in extracurricular activities can also prevent youth from using drugs.

Resources:

https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/pep18-03.pdf

https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/methamphetamine


References:

http://netnebraska.org/node/1149970

https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/methamphetamine

https://fox42kptm.com/news/local/dea-sees-spike-in-methamphetamine-seizures

https://www.omaha.com/news/crime/as-nation-faces-opioid-epidemic-in-nebraska-and-iowa-meth/article_87acfe3a-4708-5207-9271-3a158dc66ece.html

https://www.local10.com/health/fentanyl-deadliest-drug-in-us-but-meth-kills-more-in-some-places