CONNECTED, NOT CONTROLLED FACTS

This document lists facts about digital technology use that students may use in their videos.

Remember – students must include at least one Fact and one Call to Action in their video.

Your video will be disqualified if you use untrue facts. Make sure your key message is from facts or evidence pulled from the Connected, Not Controlled website, Connected, Not Controlled Facts (below) or any of the other resources linked here:

- Canadian Paediatric Society: Screen Time and Digital Media
- Media Smarts: Building Better Tech Habits: A guide to Digital Well-being
- Sick Kids: How to Help Your Child Set Healthy Screen Time Limits
- Kids Help Phone: Social Media Resources
- Telus Wise©:Helping Youth Stay Safe Online

UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY USE PROBLEMS

- Digital technology plays an important role in our daily lives, so it's important to know safe and healthy ways to use it.
- **Problem technology use** (PTU) is a term to describe using too much digital technology, like video games and social media. This can affect your health and well-being and may hurt your physical health, mental health, and social relationships.[1]
  - Instead of calling it "addiction," use terms like PTU (Problem Technology Use), PSU (Problem Smartphone Use), or PSMU (Problem Social Media Use).
  - These terms help reduce negative feelings about the issue and make us think about why people use technology. This way, we can reflect if we are balancing our technology use, with other activities in our life.
- Recreational screen time is the time you spend looking at screens, like TVs, computers, tablets, or phones, when you're not learning at school or doing homework. This happens during your free time when you're relaxing or not being active.

Find more information about the Connected, Not Controlled Challenge at:
wechu.org/cnc

Digital Technology Use and Your Mental Health

- **Depression, anxiety, chronic stress and low self-esteem**: Research shows that using digital media a lot can negatively affect children's and youths' mental health.[2]

- **Media multitasking**: This means using more than one screen or different social media apps at the same time. It can hurt your sleep and make it hard to focus. This can affect your schoolwork and how you talk to other people. When you multitask with media, you might find it harder to read, solve problems, and feel confident about your homework. It's important to stay focused on one thing at a time to do your best in school and in life.[2]

- **Gender differences**: Girls and young women spend more time on social media compared to boys. This means they might be more likely to experience cyberbullying and may face more challenges with their mental health.[2]

- **More hours on screens= greater risk**: The more hours per day that a youth spends on screens, the greater the risk of developing problems with their mental health. This can show up as emotional outbursts, worries, or low mood.[3]

- **Brain development in teens**: During your teens, a part of the brain called the prefrontal cortex is growing and developing. This area helps youth make decisions and control their actions and behaviours. Since, this part of the brain isn't fully developed until around our mid-twenties, teenagers can be more likely to take risks.[4]

Digital Technology Use and Your Mental Health

- **Reward system and instant gratification**: Technology like social media and gaming can make our brains feel good by releasing a chemical called dopamine. Dopamine is linked to feelings of pleasure and motivation. When young people spend a lot of time using technology, like scrolling through their feeds, they get quick rewards. This can lead to a habit where our brains start to crave more of these fast rewards, making us want everything right away (instant gratification).[5]

- **Problem gambling and youth:** Technology use has made it easier for children and teens to see or take part in online gambling. This can happen through online gaming, in-game buying of "loot boxes" or "skins", watching influencers, using streaming sites, playing social casino games, or e-sports betting. Seeing this content at a young age can make risky behaviour feel normal. It can also affect how the brain develops, by rewarding quick, impulsive choices. Overtime, this can lead to problems with mental health, anxiety, substance use, money, and school.[6]

- **Using Artificial Intelligence (AI):** AI tools can be helpful, but they can also spread false or hurtful information. When using AI it's important to not use it too much, use it safely, and only use it for tasks that are right for your age. Using AI too often, including chatbots, can affect your mental health, social skills, and ability to think and solve problems on your own.[7]

- **Self-harm:** Sometimes social media can make self-harm and thoughts of suicide seem normal or even encourage them among youth.[2]
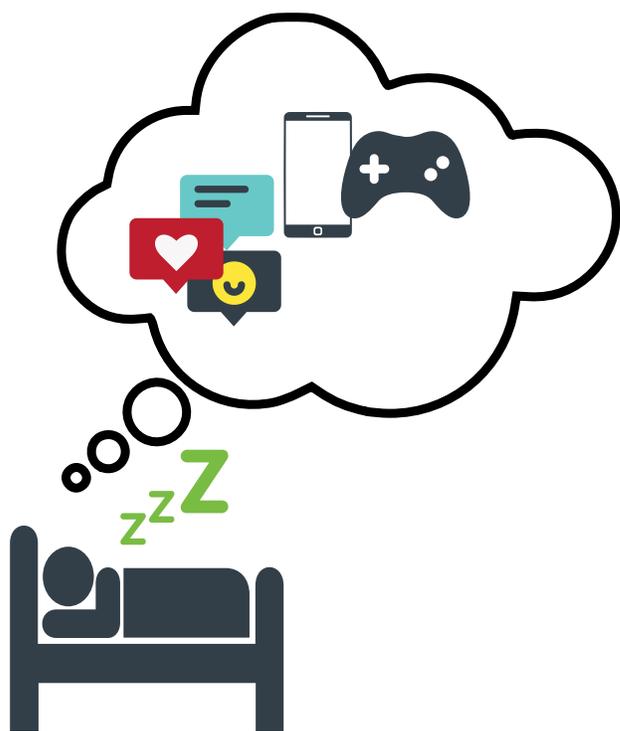
WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY
HEALTH unit
Bureau de santé de Windsor-comté d'Essex

3

CONNECTED
NOT
CONTROLLED

CONNECTED, NOT CONTROLLED FACTS

Digital Technology Use and Your Physical Health and Sleep

- **24-hour Movement Guidelines:** These guidelines help us think about how we spend our entire day.[8] They look at three main areas: being active, sedentary (being inactive), and sleeping. Here's what is suggested for each part of the day:
  - **Screen time**: Children and youth (ages 5 to 17 years), should get no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time per day.
  - **Sleep**: Children and youth need good quality, uninterrupted sleep, with consistent bed and wake-up times.
    - 5 to 13 year olds: 9 to 11 hours of sleep per night.
    - 14 to 17 year olds: need 8 to 10 hours per night.
  - **Physical activity**: Children and youth should get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day.

By balancing screen time with these activities, you can stay healthy and feel your best every day!

Are youth meeting the guidelines?

The *2023 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey*. collected data from Windsor-Essex County students in grades 7 to 12 and found that:

- 82% of youth are spending 3 or more hours daily on screens.
  - 52.6% of these youth are spending 5 hours or more daily on screens.
- 50% are spending 3 or more hours on social media.
- 62% getting 7 or less hours a sleep on school nights.
- 32% are getting at least 60 minutes of physical activity 6-7 days a week.

Digital Technology Use and Your Physical Health and Sleep

- **Pushing out activities**: Often called displacement, screen time should not take the place of important activities like being active, playing outside, getting enough sleep, or spending time with friends and family in person.

- **Remove screens from bedrooms**: Having screens in bedrooms can make it hard to sleep. Screens can make it harder to fall asleep, affect the sleep quality, and leave you feeling tired the next day.[9]

- **Insomnia or other sleep issues:** Using technology a lot during the day can also affect how well you sleep at night. When you spend too much time on screens, you might go to bed later and find it harder to fall asleep. This can lead to getting less sleep and feeling tired during the day. When youth are tired, it's harder to focus and be your best.[10]

- **Distraction**: One of the biggest dangers of using screens is getting distracted. This can happen when youth are texting or listening to music with headphones while doing activities like driving, walking, jogging, or biking. Being distracted can lead to accidents and is a serious risk to one's physical health.[11]

Digital Technology Use and Healthy Relationships

- **Social comparison:** Social media can change how youth see themselves and how they connect with others. When they see what others post online, they might start comparing themselves to those people. This can lead to negative feelings. [12]

- **Cyberbullying:** Everyday use of smartphones has created harmful environments because there are no safe zones. It can reach children and teens anytime and anywhere. This can make young people feel lonely, hurt their self-esteem, mental health, cause trouble sleeping, and even damage important friendships. [13]

- **Social connection:** Growing up, young people use the internet to connect with others. This is especially important for those who might not have many friends nearby. For 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, online support can be a helpful way to find friends and feel understood. Connecting online can make a big difference in their lives, helping them feel supported and less alone.[14]

- **Family and peer influences:** Family stress, peer pressure, and relationships all play a big role in how youth use technology. These influences can either help avoid or create problems when it comes to tech use. It's important to understand how family and friends can support youth or add to stress, as they navigate their time with devices.[15]

Digital Technology Use Solutions and Building Better Habits

- **Media plans and screen-free times and spaces:** Healthy screen use and strategies such as family media plans and screen-free times can help families to prevent and address PTU.[16]
- **Digital media literacy skills**: To be wise users of media, youth need to learn important skills. These skills include:
  - **Accessing and Navigating Digital Media**: Knowing how to find and use different types of online media.
  - **Analyzing and Evaluating Media Critically**: Looking at media carefully to understand its message and decide if it is true or helpful.
  - **Using Digital Tools**: Using technology for schoolwork and personal hobbies.
  - **Engaging with Media**: Using media to express themselves and connect with others in their communities, both online and in real life.

These skills are essential for making smart choices in a digital world!

- **Digital citizenship**: Being a good digital citizen means using the internet safely and responsibly. It's important to treat others with respect when we are online. This includes being kind in our messages and sharing helpful information. When we are in digital spaces, we should think about how our actions affect our communities. By being positive and helpful online, we contribute to a healthy and supportive environment for everyone.[17]
- **The Four M's of Screen Time:**
  - **Minimize screen time**: Try to spend less time in front of screens.
  - **Mitigate risks**: Work on reducing any problems that come from using screens too much.
  - **Mindful use**: Be aware of how you use screens and make good choices.
  - **Model healthy screen use**: Show younger people how to use screens in a safe and positive way.

It's important for parents and caregivers to be involved in how youth use digital devices. When families work together on-screen time, they can make better choices and enjoy digital media in a safer way.

WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY
HEALTH UNIT
Bureau de santé de Windsor-comté d'Essex

CONNECTED
NOT
CONTROLLED

REFERENCES

- **1.** Centre for Addiction and Mental Health [CAMH]. 2024. Youth, Smartphones and Social Media Use. Retrieved from https://kmb.camh.ca/uploads/0b9d214a-e13a-4f9c-8240-3dc057bb81f4.pdf
- **2.** Abi-Jaoude, E., Naylor, K.T. & Pignatiello, A. (2020). Smartphones, social media use and youth mental health. Canadian Medical Association Journal, 192 (6), E136–E141. Available: https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.190434
- **3.** School Mental Health Ontario. (2025). Helping your child manage digital technology. Retrieved from https://smho-smso.ca/online-resources/info-sheet-helping-your-child-manage-digital-technology/
- **4.** Crone, E.A., Konijn, E.A. (2018). Media use and brain development during adolescence. Nature Communications 9, 588. Retrieved from https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-03126-x#citeas
- **5.** Kuss, D.J. & Griffiths, M.D. (2017). Social networking sites and addiction: Ten lessons learned. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 14, 311; doi:10.3390/ijerph14030311
- **6**. Gambling, Gaming and Technology Use. (2026). Youth and problem gambling. Retrieved from https://kmb.camh.ca/ggtu/knowledge-translation/youth
- **7**. Media Smarts. (2025). What is AI. Retrieved from https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/general-information/ai-and-algorithms.
- **8.** Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. (2023). Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines: An Integration of Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour, and Sleep. Retrieved from https://csepguidelines.ca
- **9.** Michelle Ponti, Screen time and preschool children: Promoting health and development in a digital world, Paediatrics & Child Health, Volume 28, Issue 3, June 2023, Pages 184–192, https://doi.org/10.1093/pch/pxac125
- **10.** Thomée, S. (2018). Mobile phone use and mental health. A review of the research that takes a psychological perspective on exposure. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 15 (12), Article 2692. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15122692.
- **11.** Canadian Paediatric Society, Digital Health Task Force (2019). Digital media: Promoting healthy screen use in school-aged children and adolescents. Pediatric Child Health, 24(6):402–408
- **12.** Gerwin, R. L., Kaliebe, K., & Daigle, M. (2018). The Interplay Between Digital Media Use and Development. Child and adolescent psychiatric clinics of North America, 27(2), 345–355. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2017.11.002
- **13.** Government of Canada (2024). Cyberbullying. Retrieved from: https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/cyberbullying.html
- **14.** Ybarra, M.L., Mitchell, K.J., Palmer, N.A. & Reisner, S.L. (2015). Online social support as a buffer against online and offline peer and sexual victimization among U.S. LGBT and non-LGBT youth. Child Abuse & Neglect, 39, 123–136. Available: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2014.08.006.
- **15.** Lahti, H., Kulmala, M., Hietajärvi, L., Lyyra, N., Kleszczewska, D., Boniel-Nissim, M., ... & Paakkari, L. (2024). What counteracts problematic social media use in adolescence? A cross-national observational study. Journal of Adolescent Health, 74(1), 98-112.
- **16.** Canadian Paediatric Society, Digital Health Task Force, Ottawa, Ontario. (2019). Digital media: Promoting healthy screen use in school-aged children and adolescents. Paediatrics & Child Health, 24(6), 402-408.
- **17.** MediaSmarts. (2024). Building better tech habits: A guide to digital well-being. Retrieved from https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/2024-09/guide_building_better_tech_habits.pdf