

The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Adolescents

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Dear Editor

Today, the role of media, including the Internet, in the lives and education of teenagers is undeniable, and its influence on teenagers is increasing daily. Life in the modern world is unimaginable without the Internet and other mass media (1). The influence of media, especially the Internet, on teenagers' social and moral development sometimes surpasses that of parents and teachers, as they spend a significant amount of time watching TV and using the Internet (2). Media and the Internet are not inherently problematic, but excessive or unsupervised usage can lead to problems in various areas (3).

One of these issues is modeling antisocial behaviors such as aggression and sexual matters (4). In some media, sexual and violent programs are presented as desirable and natural. Over time, teenagers may adopt these behaviors themselves, desensitizing to these antisocial actions and considering them normal (5).

Some teenagers spend most of their time watching TV or using computers and the Internet, which can hinder them from completing essential tasks, particularly homework. This excessive media and the Internet use can particularly lead to academic setbacks for teenagers with disabilities (6).

They exhibit hyperactive attention, paradoxically becoming quickly fatigued when doing homework, yet capable of sitting still for extended periods in front of the TV and computer. Given that using the Internet and computer games is stimulating and instantly gratifying, these individuals often neglect their homework, resulting in severe academic

decline while using the Internet and computers (7).

Another consequence of excessive media and the Internet usage is sleep deprivation among teenagers, as they stay up late using computers and other media. These consequences include daytime sleepiness, reduced learning capacity, academic underperformance, mood swings, irritability, and other adolescent behavioral problems (2).

Teenagers who habitually engage in excessive media and the Internet use typically have weakened social connections avoiding friends and social activities. Gradually, they become isolated, even experiencing depression, diminishing their academic motivation. Additionally, they may encounter difficulties in their relationships with parents (8). Furthermore, prioritizing media over physical activities and exercise can lead to obesity in teenagers, resulting in decreased self-confidence, estrangement from friends, and the development of eating disorders (9).

Because computer games and the Internet use are engaging and enjoyable for teenagers, some become addicted to these devices due to overuse, akin to other forms of addiction. Their lives may become solely focused on using computers and the Internet, leading them to abandon all social activities. When prevented from using the Internet, they experience extreme stress and discomfort and may become aggressive (10).

Another issue with the Internet use is online communication with strangers, which has become a prevalent mode of interaction for teenagers. Through this medium, teenagers may connect with and befriend people, sometimes several years

older than themselves (3). These individuals can influence them, disseminating false information and, at times, subjecting them to manipulation and abuse (2).

So, what should parents do to address the issues stemming from media consumption among teenagers? Parents cannot eliminate the substantial role of media, including the Internet, in the lives of teenagers, nor should they attempt to ban it entirely due to concerns about negative impacts. Complete prohibition is often impractical, as teenagers can access these platforms outside the home, such as at school or the library (7).

The most crucial action parents can take is establishing a genuine and open relationship with their teenagers, participating in these activities alongside them. If parents engage in these activities, they will recognize that media, including the Internet; it is not always detrimental but can also impart valuable knowledge and skills to teenagers (6).

In the next step, parents should enhance teenagers' awareness of the various media programs and discuss potential dangers. Parents can leverage their teen's interest in the Internet and other media by using these programs as incentives for schoolwork and homework. They can convey that the Internet use will follow after homework completion (1). Encouraging teenagers to partake in physical activities, listen to music, or engage in other pursuits can prevent excessive media and computer use from leading to addiction. Parents should identify constructive media programs to share with their teenagers, exercising greater control over their consumption (10).

Furthermore, parents should establish household rules regarding media use, involving teenagers in the rule-making process. These rules should specify the amount of time teenagers can allocate to these devices and define the activities and times during which they can be used (10).

Supervision of teenagers is essential, though it need not always be direct. Some teenagers view direct supervision as interference. Therefore, establishing intimate communication with teenagers to understand their friends and interests is often more practical, allowing parents to intervene and protect them from potential dangers

promptly. Maintaining open lines of dialogue and encouraging teenagers to confide in their parents regarding concerns is vital. Additionally, parents should educate their teenagers about the risks of encountering online predators (2).

In conclusion, the impact of media, particularly the Internet, on the lives of adolescents is undeniable. While there are potential drawbacks, parents can play a crucial role in mitigating these issues by fostering open communication, setting guidelines, and actively participating in their teenagers' media experiences. Education and awareness are vital in helping teenagers navigate the digital landscape safely and responsibly.

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