TEENS ONLINE: WHAT SHOULD WE (NOT) BE CONCERNED ABOUT

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Worries about "Plugged in" Kids

1. What do kids/tweens/teens do online?
2. Is online communication **unhealthy**?
   - Social skills
   - Physical health
   - Emotional health (narcissism)
   - Risky behaviors (sexting)
3. Is online communication **unsafe**?
   - Whom do kids talk to? (sexual predators?)
   - Cyberbullying
4. What can parents do?
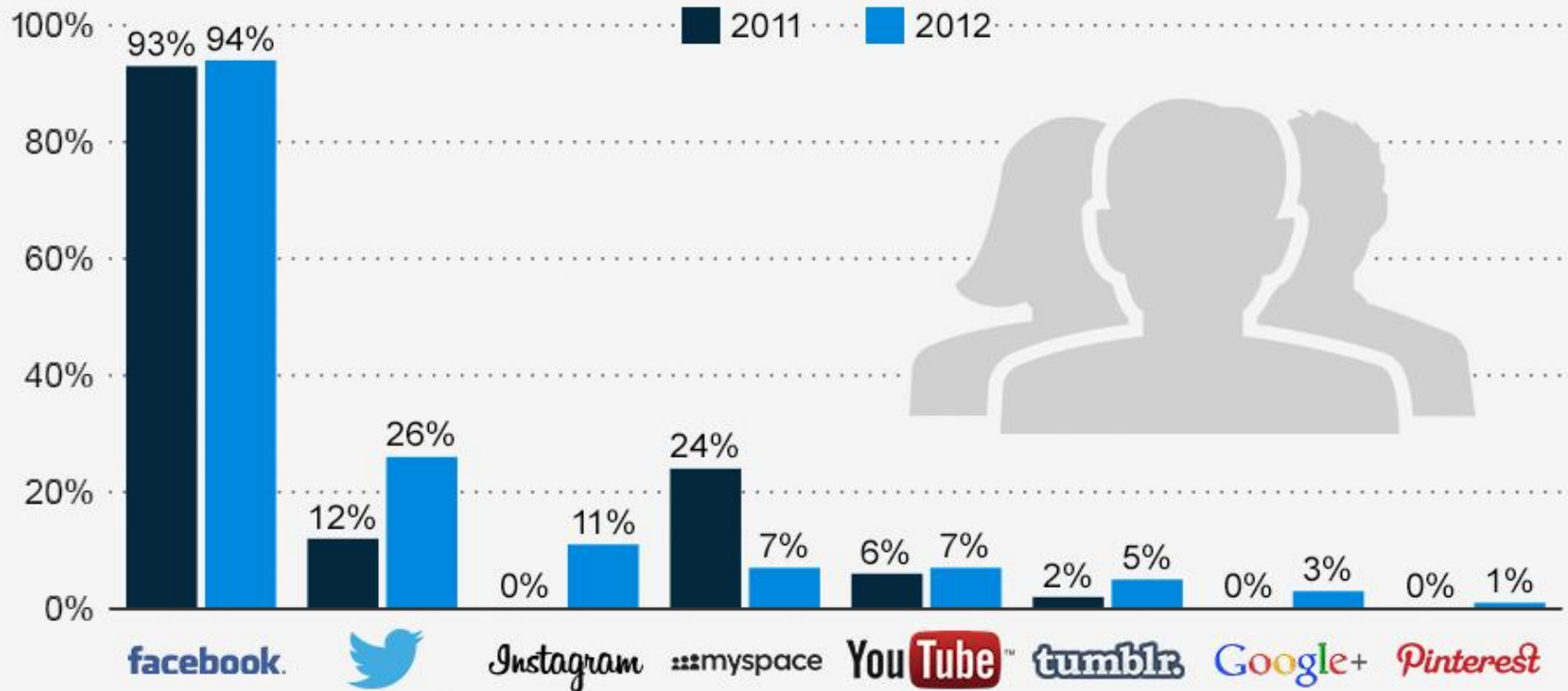5. Putting the worries in perspective

Online activity

= Use of any electronic or computer-mediated technology

- texting; Internet/app use via laptop, smartphone, iPad etc.
- Mainly for the purpose of social communication

- >50% of teens log on to social media more than once a day
- 22% of teens log on to social media more than 10 times a day
- Logging on easier than ever: via cell phones

Facebook is Still a Must for American Teens

% of U.S. teenage social media users who have an account with the following social media sites

Legend: 2011 (dark), 2012 (blue)

Site	2011	2012
facebook	93%	94%
Twitter	12%	26%
Instagram	0%	11%
myspace	24%	7%
YouTube	6%	7%
tumblr	2%	5%
Google+	0%	3%
Pinterest	0%	1%

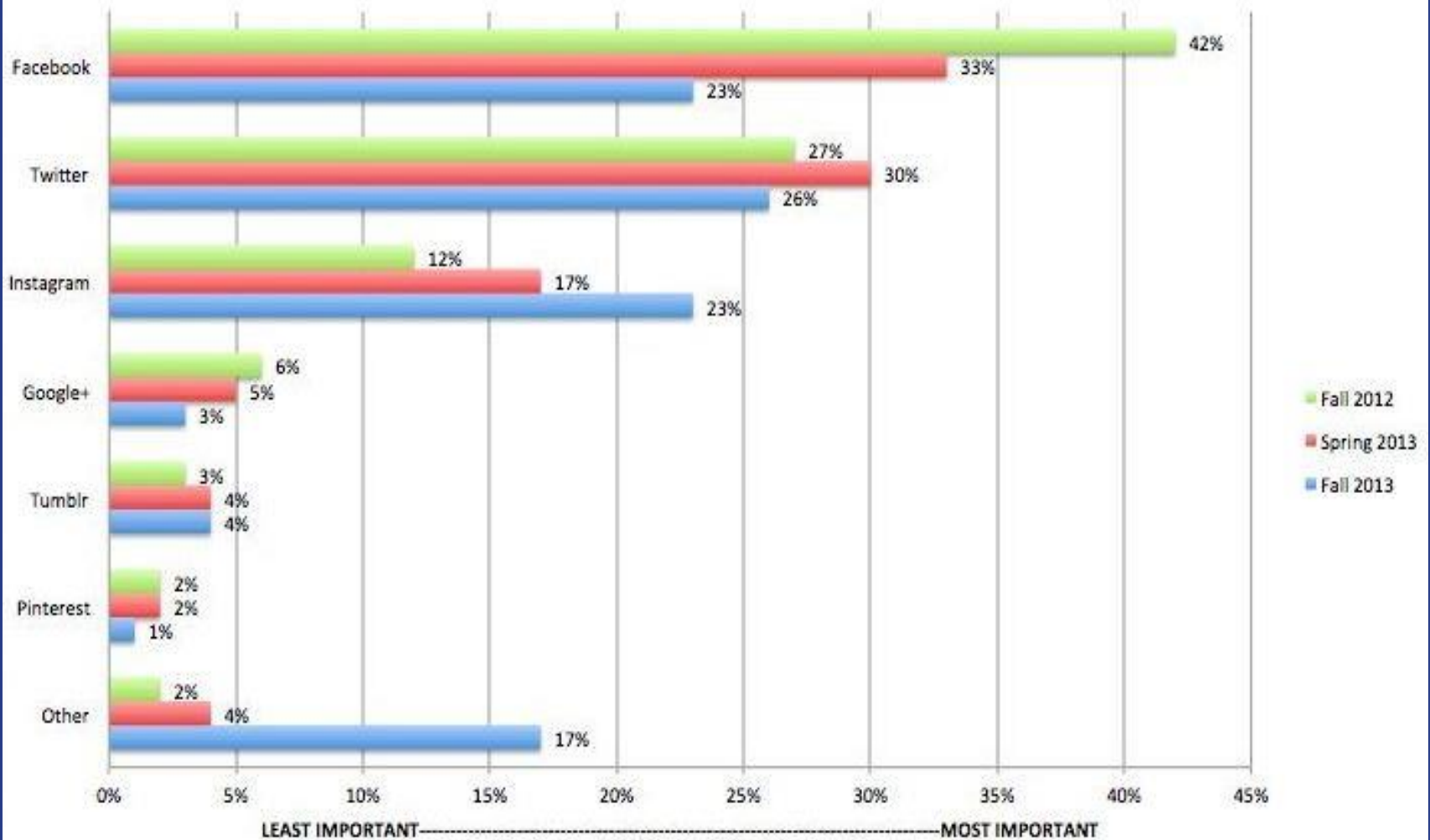n=799 in 2011 and 801 in 2012 (ages 12-17)

statista — The Statistics Portal

Mashable

Source: Pew Research Center

Twitter & Instagram show most rapid increase; The average teen Facebook user has 425 friends, while the typical teen Twitter user has 79 followers.

Most Important Social Media Sites For Teens

Source: Piper Jaffray

IS THIS **UNHEALTHY** FOR KIDS?

Historical trends of concerns

1. Online communication → social isolation = Displacement hypothesis

2. Social isolation→ online communication = Social compensation hypothesis

3. Offline social connectedness→ Online social connectedness = "Rich get richer" hypothesis

Too much screen time: Implications for social skills

2014 Summer Camp Experiment, Uhls et al:

- Preteens (11-13 yr olds) at camp deprived of electronic access for 5 days

- Showed improved ability to read nonverbal emotion cues (e.g., facial expressions) compared to 'non-deprived' kids

→ Instead of being worried about social displacement, need to worry about social skills, at least in preadolescence

Effects on health?—Indirect effects due to sleep deprivation/disturbance

- Teens with four or more technology devices (e.g., TV, phone, computer) in bedroom have more sleeping difficulties

- Using computers or phones late at night also related to less total sleep

- Among young adults (i.e., college students), 'heavy users' of technology experience more academic difficulties
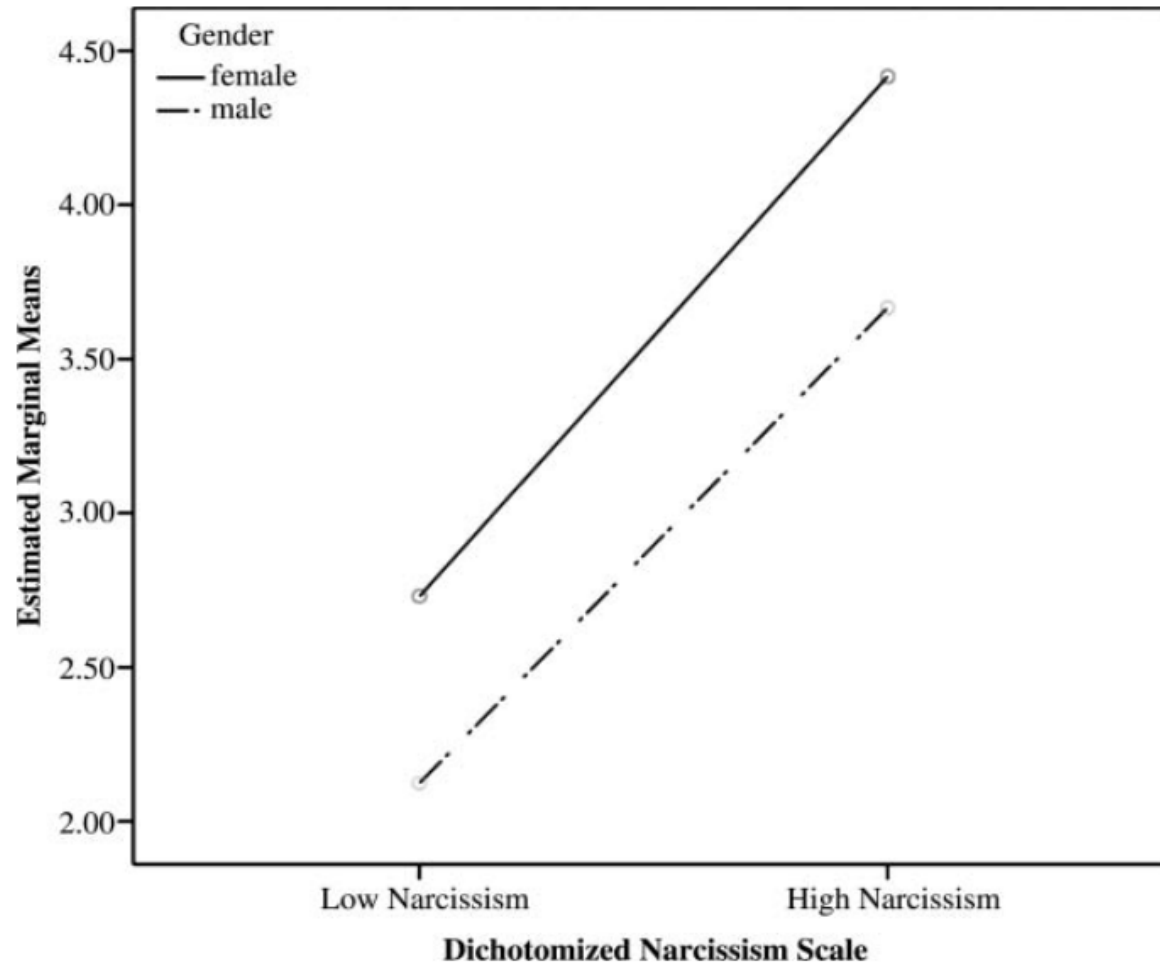
Increased Self-focus & Narcissism

FIG. 3. Estimated marginal means of Main Photo self-promotion.

100 college students: web pages rated for self-promotion; measures of narcissism & self esteem

…Pictures also solicit comments

Especially for displays of sexuality

■*I've been on girls' pages who they've probably not had those provocative pictures and have no comments and the girls who just are looking nice have 40 **comments** on each picture saying "**you're hot**".* (female)

Manago et al., 2008:
■Two qualitative studies with college students (age18-22)
  ① Focus groups
  ② One-on-one "profile tours" & interviews

Facebook highlights social comparisons

- *"Oh so much social comparison happens on SNS… **you always want to keep tabs on the most popular girl in school**."* (female)

- *"[What is cool] changes… every season something new is hot so like as long as you keep up with those stuff and then you try to incorporate those into your page somehow."* (male)

"Polished and packaged selves" –H. Gardner

Facebook Envy

- Some evidence on young adults suggests that browsing Facebook pages (passive following) exacerbates feelings of envy and decreases life satisfaction
- Social comparisons toward others who are having more fun and who look more popular

Facebook depression?

- Greater amount of time spent online frequently involves passive following of others online
- But depressed youth also likely to engage in passive following and maladaptive social comparisons
- → Need to be careful not to blame the medium

False Online Identities?

- Up to 50% of adolescents 'push the boundaries' of their identities online to achieve social goals (e.g., pretending to be more attractive)

- Very small proportion of youth report creating completely false identities online

Negotiating Relationships Through Public Comments

- *"If you want to make sure that this guy is only dating you I would say "Oh I had such a fun time with you last night" and make sure that they know that you're hanging out with him."* (female)

- *I think there's a really thin line between **obsession** and the norm…I went through a rough break-up earlier this year… and I was like, ok I'm gonna check his account…you don't think it's that crazy at the moment."* (female)

General SNS effects on development & well-being

- Social networking sites **<u>intensify</u>** developmental issues of adolescence

  - **Social Comparisons**
    - idealized peer displays, crafting images, female sexual objectification

  - **Relationship displays**
    - personal is public, peer approval of relationships, preoccupation, "stalking"

Sexting

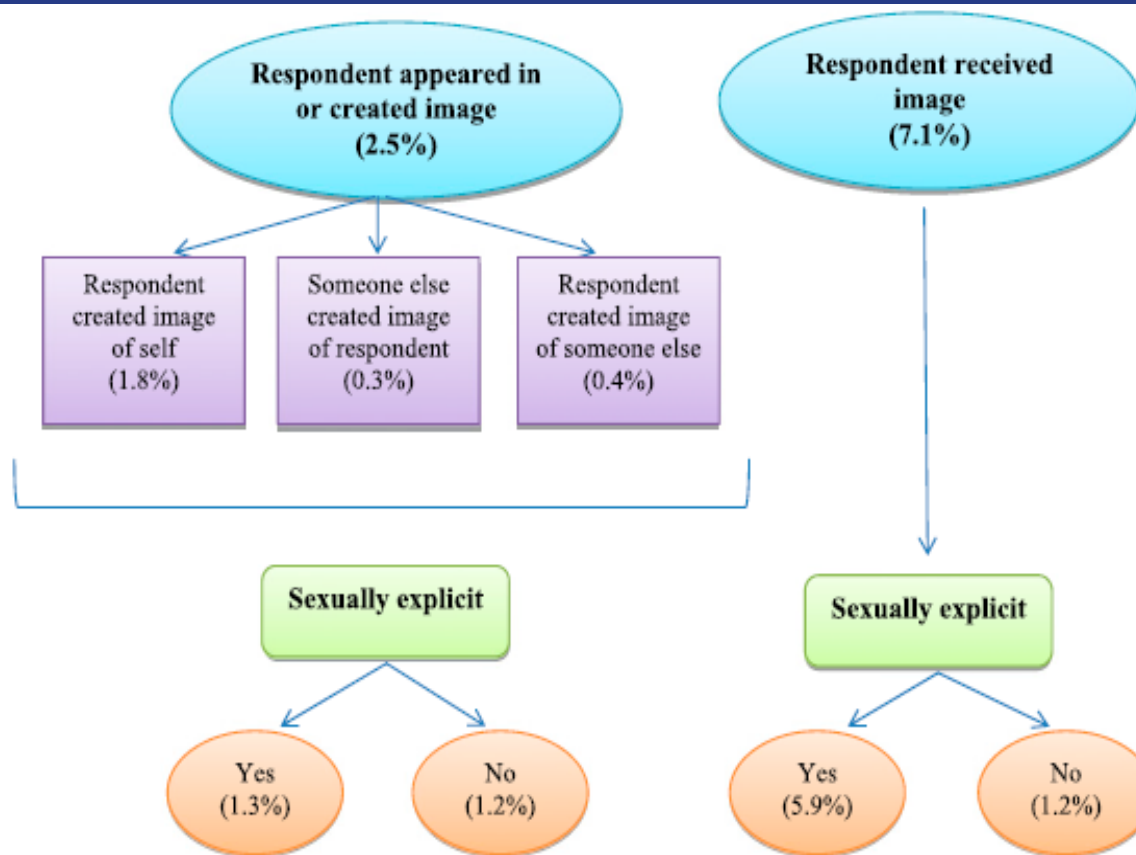## Youth Internet Safety Survey, 10-17 yr olds (n= 1560)

FIGURE 1
Types of sexting involvement (percentages based on *N* = 1560).

- Although only 10% involved, of the 16 & 17 yr olds 28-31% of involved

- 20-25% of the involved reported feeling upset, embarrassed, afraid

- Context: as part of developing/ ongoing romantic relationships?

Sexting related to sexual activity

- 16yr olds from TX (n=964) followed for one year
- Sending a sext predicted sexual activity 1 yr later, but did not predict RISKY (unprotected, multiple partner, alcohol-related) sex
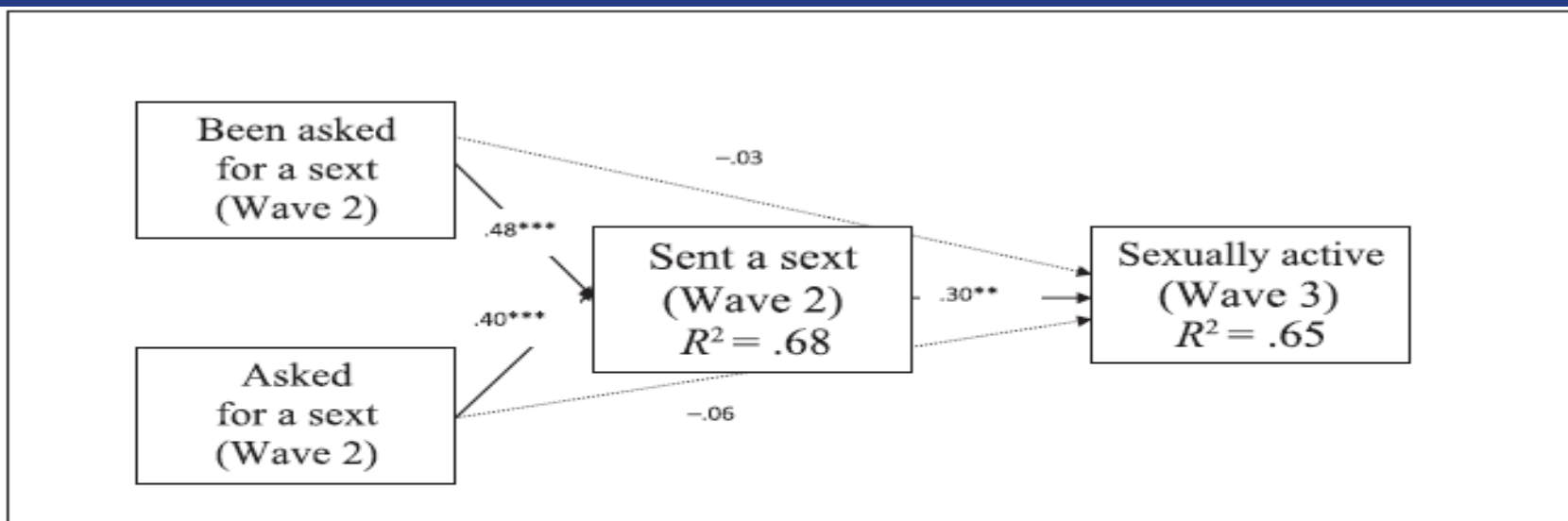- Sexting part of (initiating) sexual relationships?

FIGURE 1
Temporal relationship between sexting and sexual behaviors. *Note.* Path coefficients and correlations are completely standardized. Although not shown here, dating and sexual activity at Wave 2, grade, gender, and ethnicity were included as covariates in the model. All significant ($p < .05$) paths are highlighted by boldface and marked by asterisks. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

ARE KIDS UNSAFE ONLINE?

What are the most likely risks facing youth online?

Internet Safety Technical Task Force, 2008:

1. Sexual solicitation of minors by adults is NOT a prevalent problem

2. Problem of bullying among youth by peers, both online and offline, poses a much more serious challenge

Cyberbullying and Offline Bullying

- Anywhere between 19-48% of adolescents experience cyberbullying at some time

- Offline (e.g., at school) bullying > cyberbullying

- Cyber and offline bullied related: those who repeatedly bullied in school, 7 times more likely to be cyberbullied

- Highest rates of any bullying in middle school

Cyberbullying & mental health

- Cyberbullying related to feelings of hopelessness, anger, depression, suicidal ideation

- Goes unnoticed because parents/teachers less likely to be aware

- Schools unlikely to deal with cyberbullying

Cyberbullying: Unique concerns

- Unmonitored space (the new "wild west")

- Lack of social cues promotes self-disclosure that can be abused by others

- Lack of social cues makes it easy to spread a nasty message (as an "assistant")

- A nasty message may hurt more if faced alone in front of a phone & computer screen in spite of hundreds of Facebook "friends" who do not seem to care

WHAT **SHOULD** PARENTS BE CONCERNED ABOUT?

Warranted parental worries

1. **Too much screen time**
- Preteens: social skills
- Teens: sleep

2. **Promoting self-focus**
- Preoccupation with one's ideal self
- Keeping up with competition

3. **Not understanding the risks** associated with electronic footprints & potential misuse of private information

4. **Not seeking help with cyberbullying**

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Can't protect when we don't see or understand

1. Learn about the tools & communication methods
2. Talk regularly with the teen about online issues
3. Build trust: set limits, but respect privacy; explain your reasons & negotiate rules
4. Minimize media usage in the kids' bedrooms
5. Try to get a sense of motives: seeking for attention or approval to boost self-esteem?
6. Contracts/ tracking programs (spyware)?— depends on your child
7. Understand (and don't underestimate) the benefits

PUTTING THE WORRIES IN PERSPECTIVE…

Benefits: Social

Online behaviors useful for
Keeping contact with peers

- Providing support during shared times of distress

- Finding similar others (e.g., particularly relevant for stigmatized/marginalized youth)

- Staying "tuned in" (particularly important for teens who shy away from face-to-face contact)

Benefits: Emotional

Online behaviors useful for
Identity development

- Exploring personal interests

- Finding accepting communities/support (e.g., Tumblr)

- Offering a venue of self-expression

Benefits: Health-related Information

Online behaviors useful for
Information seeking

- Exchanging/sharing information (group projects)

- Anonymous help seeking

- Potentially embarrassing topics (sexuality, STDs, depression)