

Is technology harmful to youngsters?

Neil: When you were a teenager did your parents worry that you were watching too much television, Sam?

Sam: They used to tell me that watching too much TV would **turn my eyes** square – but they were only joking.

Neil: When I was growing up there were only three or four television **channels**. For parents today, there are hundreds of TV channels to worry about, **not to mention** the internet, video games, and social media – and all of it is **accessible through** a smartphone. **No wonder** parents are worried about the **impact of technology** on young people

Sam: I don't think it's all bad news, Neil. In fact, in this program, we'll be taking a look at a new **report** which finds little **evidence** to **link** technology **with** mental health problems in **adolescents** – that's young people who are in the **process of developing from** children **into** adults

Neil: I'm not convinced, Sam. Think about how much time **youngsters** spend **staring at screens** every day

Sam: True, but unlike **passively** watching television today's technology is **interactive**, connecting teenagers to their friends around the world

Neil: Well, maybe my quiz question will change your mind. Are you ready? On average how many **hours per day** do British teenagers spend on their screens? Is it

- a) 5 and a half hours
- b) 6 and a half hours
- c) 7 and a half hours

Sam: I'll say it's b) 6 and a half hours

Neil: That sounds a lot to me

Sam: Well, whatever Neil thinks, a new study from the Oxford Internet Institute **paints** a more **hopeful picture**. The study **analyzed** data from over 400,000 British and American teenagers and found little or no **link** between adolescents' **tech use** and **mental health problems**.

Neil: Listen to Gareth Mitchell and Ghislaine Boddington, co-presenters of BBC World Service's, Digital Planet, as they discuss the report's findings

Gareth Mitchell: Ghislaine Boddington, you've been looking at some of the findings yourself, haven't you? So, what's your **response** so far? Were you **expecting**, Ghislaine, to see some kind of smoking gun? Some kind of **link** that would say, Here we are. Here are the harms

Ghislaine Boddington: Not really, because I think we're at a point where teenagers are much savvier than many adults think, so we are at risk, all of us as journalists and research community to **assume**, maybe, this is a more **terrible** problem than we understand... because I know the teenagers around me and one thing that they do all have is **app blockers** on their sites and they **are** actually quite **aware of** the addiction problem – the design – you know, designed for **addiction**.

Neil: Many people assume that social media **harms** teenagers, so Gareth asks Ghislaine whether she was expecting to find a "**smoking gun**" in the report.

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Sam: The expression “a smoking gun” means evidence that **proves** something is true, for example, evidence proving that technology is harmful to young people

Neil: But Ghislaine **doesn't** think this is true. Actually, she calls teenagers “savvy,” meaning that they have **practical knowledge** of technology and a good understanding of how to use it.

Sam: One example of teenagers being **technologically** savvy is their use of app blockers – software that prevents unwanted apps and websites from popping up and allows users to **set timers** which **limit screen time**.

Neil: **Reducing** screen time is important because nowadays most video games and social media are **designed for** addiction – intended to **manipulate** human **psychology** to make the user want to **keep playing**.

Sam: But it seems that today's adolescents are **savvy** enough to know how to use electronic devices **sensibly**. How else can we explain the fact that, according to this research, there's **no clear link between** using tech and mental health problems

Neil: Yes, that's certainly the view of the research team leader, Dr. Matti Vuorre. Here he is speaking with the BBC World Service program, Digital Planet, about an interesting and very modern term – see if you can hear it

Dr. Matti Vuorre: We often hear the term, “digital native,” you know you grow up with a **device** in your hand almost, and then it's not a surprise that you are **skilled at using** those technologies **to your benefit**.

Neil: Did you hear the expression Dr. Vuorre used, Sam

Sam: Yes. He called teenagers **digital natives**, meaning someone who is very **familiar** with and **comfortable** using computers and digital technology because they've **grown up with** them.

Neil: So maybe there are benefits to spending hours looking at screens, after all. In my quiz question, I asked Sam about the **average daily screen time** for British teenagers.

Sam: I said it was b) 6 and a half hours

Neil: Which was the correct answer! Very savvy of you, Sam! OK, let's recap the vocabulary from this program about **the impact of tech on** adolescents – that's young people who are developing into adults.

Sam: Today's adolescents are “**digital natives**” – people who are **very familiar with digital technology** because **they've grown up with it**.

Neil: If you are “**savvy**,” you have a **good practical understanding of something**.

Sam: A “**smoking gun**” refers to information or evidence that **proves that something is true**.

Neil: An “**app blocker**” is software that blocks **pop-up apps** and **websites** and allows users to set screen time limits.

Sam: And “**designed for addiction**” describes **immersive** video games and social media which are designed to **manipulate human psychology** and **make it hard to stop playing**.