



**TRUTH
ABOUT TECH:**

*A Road Map for
Kids' Digital Well-Being*



common sense[®]

in partnership with

Center for
Humane
Technology

Common Sense and the Center for Humane Technology, a new organization of former industry insiders, have formed a partnership to put pressure on the tech industry to make its products, especially those for children, less intrusive and manipulative.

Nearly every child under 8 in America (98 percent) has access to a mobile device at home, and kids and teens represent one in three internet users worldwide. And while technology is often a catalytic force for good, its overwhelming presence can have real human costs. Our kids' feeds are flooded with bots, fake news, hate speech, and apps that are designed to grab their digital identities and keep them clicking. Parents, teachers, the media, and even the leaders of the tech companies themselves are expressing growing concerns about the role tech may play in depression, anxiety, and even suicide among young people. Put simply, we cannot afford to let this broad manipulation of young minds go on without a nationwide effort to identify the potential risks, reduce the known harms, and harness the remarkable power of technology for good.



Tech that captures kids' attention isn't always best for their well-being.

The very features that keep kids hooked can also take a toll on kids' physical and mental health and on their role as vibrant digital citizens.

-  Kids can turn **Snapchat** conversations into "streaks," redefining how our children measure friendship.
-  **Instagram** can glorify the picture-perfect life, which can erode young people's self-worth.
-  **Facebook** often segregates us into echo chambers, which can fragment our communities.
-  More than half of **Google Play** apps targeted at children under 13 don't adequately protect kids' data.
-  Every day, more than 500,000 hours of video are uploaded to **YouTube**. This can include harmful content aimed at kids and created by automated bots.

MENTAL HEALTH

Cyberbullying

Up to 40% of children have been involved in a cyberbullying incident.

Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, M. R. (2014). Bullying in the digital age: A critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073.

Self-harm

48% of teens who spend more than five hours a day on electronic devices report at least one suicide-related outcome (felt very lonely and considered, planned, or attempted suicide).

Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2017). Increases in depressive symptoms, suicide-related outcomes, and suicide rates among U.S. adolescents after 2010 and links to increased new media screen time. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 2167702617723376.

Feeling Addicted

50% of teens feel addicted to their mobile devices; 78% check their devices at least hourly.

Common Sense Media. (2016). *Dealing with devices: The parent-teen dynamic*. San Francisco, CA.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Brain development

The brains of young people diagnosed with internet addiction show significantly less gray matter (associated with planning, decision-making, and impulse control).

Zhou, Y., Lin, F., Du, Y., Qin, L., Zhao, Z., Xu, J., & Lei, H. (2011). Gray matter abnormalities in Internet addiction: A voxel-based morphometry study. *European Journal of Radiology*, 79(1), 92-95.

Attention and distraction

21% of college students spend their classroom time using their devices for activities unrelated to class.

McCoy, B. (2016). Digital distractions in the classroom phase II: Student classroom use of digital devices for non-class related purposes. *Journal of Media Education*, 7(1), 5-32.

Healthy growth

A study of 2-year-olds found that BMI increases for every hour per week of media consumed.

Wen, L. M., Baur, L. A., Rissel, C., Xu, H., & Simpson, J. M. (2014). Correlates of body mass index and overweight and obesity of children aged 2 years: findings from the healthy beginnings trial. *Obesity (Silver Spring, Md.)*, 22(7), 1723-1730.

DEMOCRACY

Media literacy

67% of Americans say they get news from social media.

Pew Research Center. (2017). *News use across social media platforms 2017*.

Fake news

44% of kids age 10 to 18 feel they can tell fake news stories from real ones.

Common Sense Media. (2017). *News and America's kids: How young people perceive and are impacted by the news*. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media.

Tolerance

45% of kids age 12 to 15 have seen hate speech online.

Ofcom. (2017). *Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report 2017*.

Find out more and get involved at [commonsense.org](https://www.commonsense.org).

OUR 5-POINT PLAN FOR KIDS' DIGITAL WELL-BEING

ENGAGE THE TECH INDUSTRY to promote humane design and reforms that will lessen the potential for digital addiction.

Perhaps the strongest, most influential voice for change will come from within, as technologists, investors, and executives who want technology to be a force for good grapple with the unintended consequences of the industry they built. Just as the Union of Concerned Scientists has helped give experts a say in important policy issues around science, a consortium of technologists can provide designers, engineers, entrepreneurs, and other experts a platform to guide the future of technology policy and the impact of technology on humanity.

As a first step, let's agree to standards of ethical design: principles for tech companies to prevent, avoid, and discourage digital distraction and prioritize ethical human learning.

PURSUE A POLICY AGENDA to ensure privacy, prevent misrepresentation, and protect democracy.

Government can help guide technology companies toward humane business models by holding them accountable for the potential downsides of technology use and creating better protections for consumers. Common Sense and the Center for Humane Technology are championing smart policies and better user protections. Over the coming year, that agenda will likely include: increased privacy protections; expanded research on digital harms; state and national requirements for companies like Facebook and Google to disclose more information about political advertising; and mandatory labeling of bots posing as humans.

Find out more and get involved at commonsense.org.

EXPAND RESEARCH on the magnitude of digital addiction and potential health risks to kids.

Legislation at the federal and state levels should expand funding for research to more fully understand the physical and mental health consequences of technology use, specifically among children. In addition, tech companies should disclose their own research on kids' technology use and support future studies to evaluate the prevalence and potential risks of too much tech. Common Sense is committed to continuing to fund its research program, which includes tracking studies on how technology affects kids.

BUILD PUBLIC AWARENESS to help consumers take control of their digital lives and pressure the industry and policymakers for change.

In partnership with the Center for Humane Technology, Common Sense will provide tools, tips, and advice to help consumers take control of their digital lives. For example, Common Sense Media's #DeviceFreeDinner PSA illustrates how technology has changed our most basic family interactions. The Family Media Toolkit, endorsed and distributed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, encourages balanced media use and "device-free" time. These campaigns will evolve and amplify.

PROVIDE TOOLS to teachers and students about how to harness technology for good, and avoid overuse and digital manipulation.

Today, the majority of kids get their news from social media, and less than half of them can tell what's real and what's fake news. There are ways to empower kids to take control of their digital lives, implementing settings that lessen manipulation. Common Sense provides ratings, tips, a curriculum, and advice on news literacy and digital citizenship for tens of millions of families and educators. The Common Sense K-12 Digital Citizenship Curriculum is already in more than 50 percent of schools nationwide and will help make students aware of digital manipulation, fake news, and how to protect their own digital well-being. Digital citizenship and news-literacy learning should be in every classroom by 2020.

Common Sense is the nation's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the 21st century.

➤ [**commonsense.org**](https://commonsense.org)

The **Center for Humane Technology** is a world-class team of former tech insiders and CEOs who are advancing thoughtful solutions to change the culture, business incentives, design techniques, and organizational structures driving how technology hijacks our brains.

➤ [**humanetech.com**](https://humanetech.com)

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