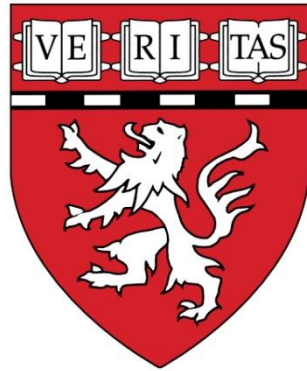# Modern Parental Worries:
Digital Media For Better Or Worse?

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Presenter Disclosures

Gene Beresin, MD, MA

The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose

This presentation was co-produced by Spenser Egnatz

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Digital Media Practice Gaps:

Professionals as well as parents and caregivers do not have an in depth understanding of the dangers as well as the potential benefits of social, digital, and online media.

Significant practice gaps exist regarding the impact of digital media on children, specifically the effect of forms of harmful social media use. Almost half of all 8–12-year-olds have their own smartphones and 77% of high schoolers reported frequent social media use. (Radesky et al., 2023; Young et al., 2024)

Frequent social media use is associated with a higher prevalence of bullying victimization at school and electronically as well as persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. (Young et al., 2024)

Additionally, riskier digital media use has increased over the past decade, with 15-27% of youths aged 10-17 sending and receiving explicit images, often without consent (Garcia et al., 2023; Madigan, et al., 2018)

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Learning Goals and Objectives

At the end of this presentation, learners will...

1. Identify the most effective means of managing cyberbullying

2. Explain how an effective means of controlling impulsive posting of material online will be conveyed to teens and parents using the WAIT criteria

3. Describe major potential risks and benefits of social and digital media

4. Assess if their child is possibly suffering from a gaming disorder

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Most Common Types of Bullying
(14,000 Middle and High School Students)

- Taunted   (66%)
- Name calling   (66%)
- Laughed at   (44-49%)
- Rumors   (36-42%)
- Physical   (24-29%)

Cyberbullying Concerns Given Usage Data

- More than **50%** of kids in the U.S. are already online by **age 5**

- % kids with their own cell phones in the U.S.:
  - 8-12 years old: **43%**
  - 13-18 years old: **88%-95%**

(Auxier, B., et al. (2020) Pew Research Center;
Radesky, J. S. et al. (2023) Common Sense Media.)

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Cyberbullying Concerns

- By middle school, **90%** of students use their phones to go online and use text messaging.

- The location of bullying is most frequently where supervision is disputed or absent.

- Pre-teens and teens do not report being victimized by strangers; the older the child, the more likely he/she knew the bully.

Outcomes of Bullying and Cyberbullying on Kids

- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts and behavior
- Anxiety and PTSD
- Social isolation
- Low self-esteem
- Poor academic performance
- Alcohol and drug use

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Outcomes of Bullying and Cyberbullying:
It Lasts for Life

Victims and bullies/victims had a much higher risk of psychiatric disorders in adulthood.
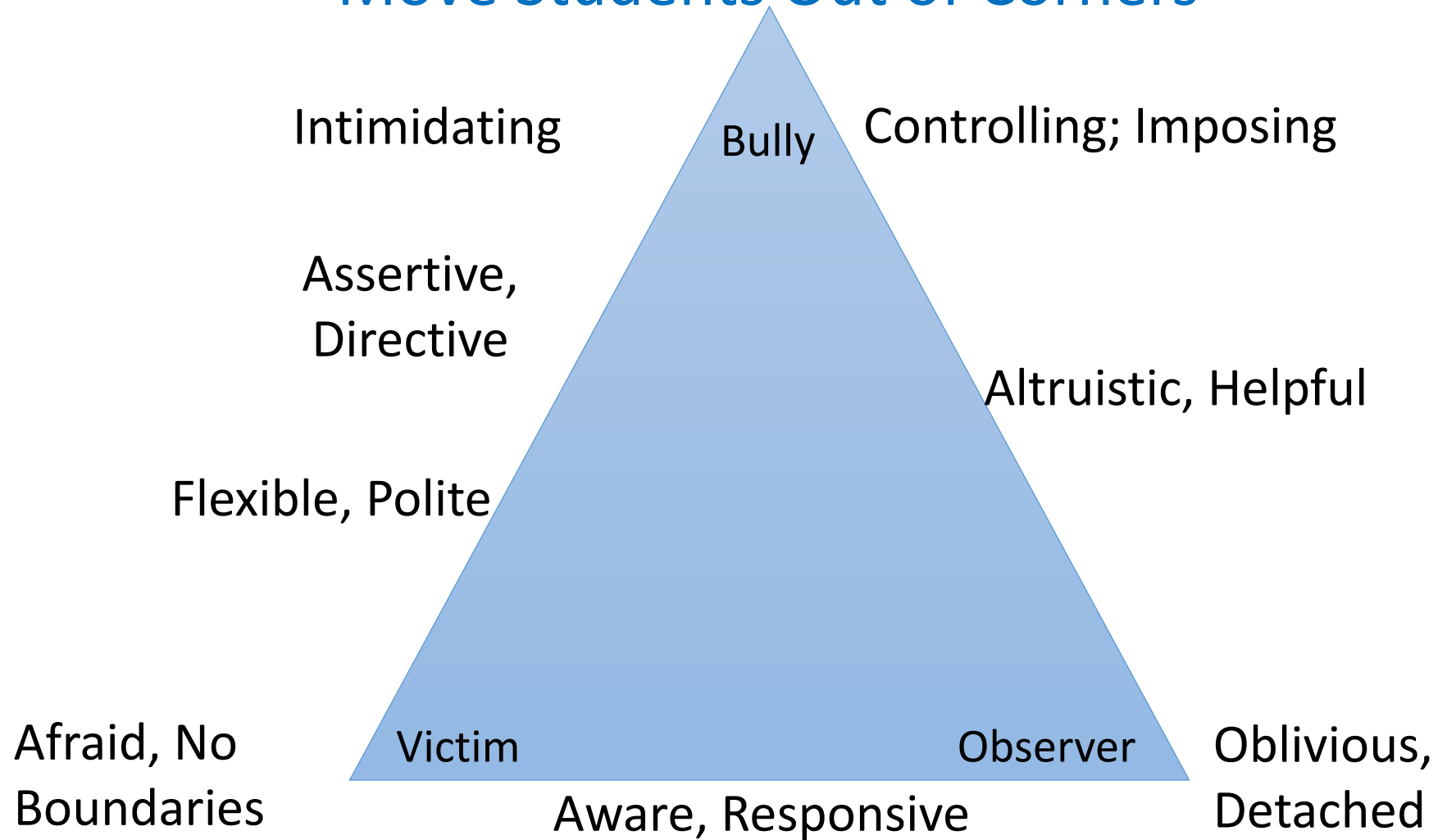
- Victims: Anxiety disorders (**4-5 x** higher) Depression (**2.77x** higher)

- Bullies/victims: Depression (**3.19x** higher) and anxiety disorders (**18x** higher); suicidality (males only; **18.5x** higher)

- Bullies: Antisocial personality disorder (**4x** higher) Depression (**1.73x** higher)

(Copeland WE et al: JAMA Psychiatry. 2013; 70(4):419-426); (Ye, Z. et al. BMC Psychiatry. 2023)

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An established method for countering bullying

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Move Students Out of Corners

Intimidating Bully Controlling; Imposing

Assertive, Directive

Altruistic, Helpful

Flexible, Polite

Afraid, No Boundaries Victim Observer Oblivious, Detached

Aware, Responsive

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Anti-Bullying Curricula

Olweus Method

- School-wide efforts: Train staff, school rules
- Classroom efforts: Post rules, consequences, regular meetings, class-level parent meetings
- Individual and community intervention

Decreased bullying by **25%**!

BUT, needs persistence, teacher training, written school policy, follow-up counseling, integration with regular curriculum

(Fekkes M et. al. Arch Pediatr Adoles Med. 2006. 160(4): 638-44)

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Life Online: Texting and Sexting

- Teens on average receive around **237** notifications daily.

- Teens check their phones, on average, **51** times per day

- **95%** of teens use at least one social media platform, and **77%** of high schoolers reported using social media several times a day

N=203

(Young E, et al. (2023) CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey;

Radesky, J. S. et al. (2023) Common Sense Media.)

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Potential Dangers of Social Media

- Though most teens think peers are generally nice, **88%** have witnessed them be cruel or mean to others.

- Many teens reference their sexual behavior, use of substances, and/or violence.

- Few think about the possible consequences.

- Risks include meeting strangers, time away from academics, image, jeopardizing one's job, etc.

Potential Benefits of Social Media

- Nurturing social relationships.

- Separation from parents and increased autonomy.

- Shy or anxious teens begin to develop social interactions.

- Forums in which to discuss morality, religion, sexuality, identity, etc. with peers.

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Sexting

- Sexting: Sexually-explicit text messaging or photos (posted or sent).

- Up to **20%** of teens are found to engage in sexting, and while studies vary widely, probably around **15%** have sent a sexually-explicit image, and as many as **27%** have received such an image.

- Reasons: To maintain or seek a relationship; peer pressure; boredom; joking around; showing off.

Meta-analysis review of 39 studies with 110,380 participants total

Madigan, S., et al. (2018) JAMA Pediatrics

Potential Risks of Sexting

- Most teens feel the recipient would want to see the photo, and are therefore unaware of the consequences.

- Forwarding is actually a huge problem as around **8.4%** of teens have been forwarded an explicit image without consent.

- There are potential serious legal problems in some states, i.e. child pornography and placement on sex-offender registries.

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Potential Risks of Sexting

- Bullying

- Sexual predators

- Long-term impact to identity, self-esteem, image

- **25%** of teens who received sexually explicit images reported feeling very or extremely upset, embarrassed, or afraid as a result of their action

Gassó, A. et al. (2019). International Journal Of Environmental Research and Public.

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Interventions: W.A.I.T.

- **W – Wide-Audience:** Would I say this in front of a school assembly?

- **A – Affect:** Am I in a good emotional place right now?

- **I – Intent:** Might my intent be misunderstood?

- **T – Today:** …Tomorrow, or the next day? Can this wait a day?

Gorrindo T & Fishel A: Hit Send, No Wait: The Dangers of Hyperpersonal Online Life

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Guidance for Parents and Caregivers

- Familiarity with your child's use of digital media (phone, computer, social media, etc.).

- **TALK** with your kids about the use of digital media.

- **ASK** them to teach you how to use the media.

- Media literacy education for parents and grandparents.

eParenting: Setting Limits Even If Your Kids Know More Than You Do - MGH

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Gaming Disorder: Is It a Real Illness?

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A Common Parental Complaint

"He's playing games all the time. Every chance he gets! From the time he gets home until bedtime, he is in his room on that computer. And spends almost no time with the family. Is he addicted? I'm really worried!"

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What is Internet Gaming Disorder?
World Health Organization

- In the 11ᵗʰ Edition of the International Classification of Diseases: Internet Gaming Disorder is an illness

- It is considered a form of addiction

- Disagreement with the American Psychiatric Association (DSM V) that does not recognize it, but "requires additional study."

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American Psychiatric Association DSMV Criteria
(5 or more)

- Preoccupation with internet gaming: the dominant activity in daily life

- Experienced withdrawal: when taken away – irritable, sad or anxious

- Developed tolerance: the need to spend increase time playing

- Loss of control: unsuccessful attempts to control preoccupation

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DSMV Criteria (continued)

- Continued use: excessive use despite awareness of problems in other areas of life caused by game-playing

- Misleading others: family members, therapists, others

- Use as an escape: playing in order to escape a negative mood

- Reduced interests: in previous hobbies or other entertainment

- Risked opportunities: risk or loss of relationships, job or activities

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Major Questions and Critique

- Study of 19,000 gamers from US, UK, Canada and Germany
  - 3% of subjects met criteria
  - .3-1% felt distress due to a gaming disorder

    Andrew K. Przybylski, Ph.D., Netta Weinstein, Ph.D., Kou Murayama, Ph.D.

    Am J Psychiatry 174:3, March 2017

- Lots of questions:
  - Why not use it as an escape?
  - Why not have this as a special interest or hobby?
  - Why not apply the same criteria to work, exercise, eating, playing the piano

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Internet Gaming Disorder: What Can Parents Do?

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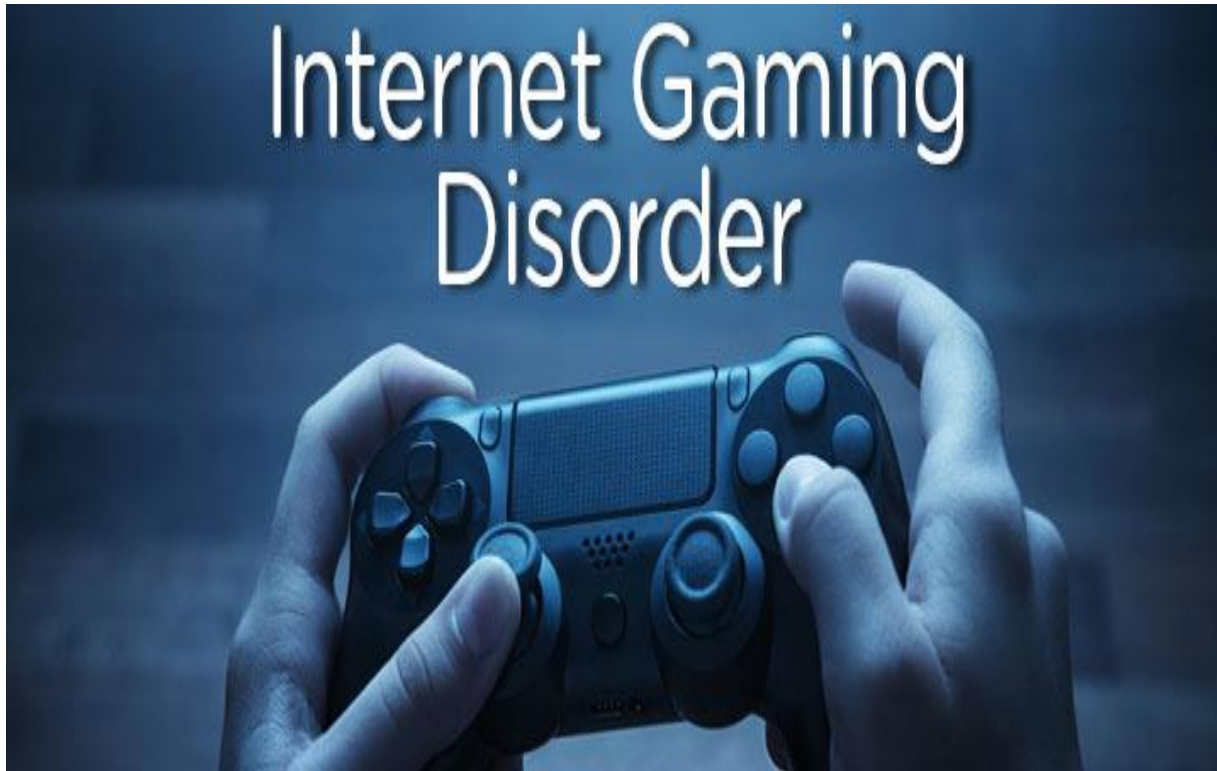
What to Look For?

- Plays in a way that is very consuming

- Declining academics

- Glued to the screen

- Limited other activities

- Not telling the truth about time spent into late-night hours

- Refuses to take a family trip or go on summer vacation

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Myth: Videogames (and Media) Cause Violent Behavior

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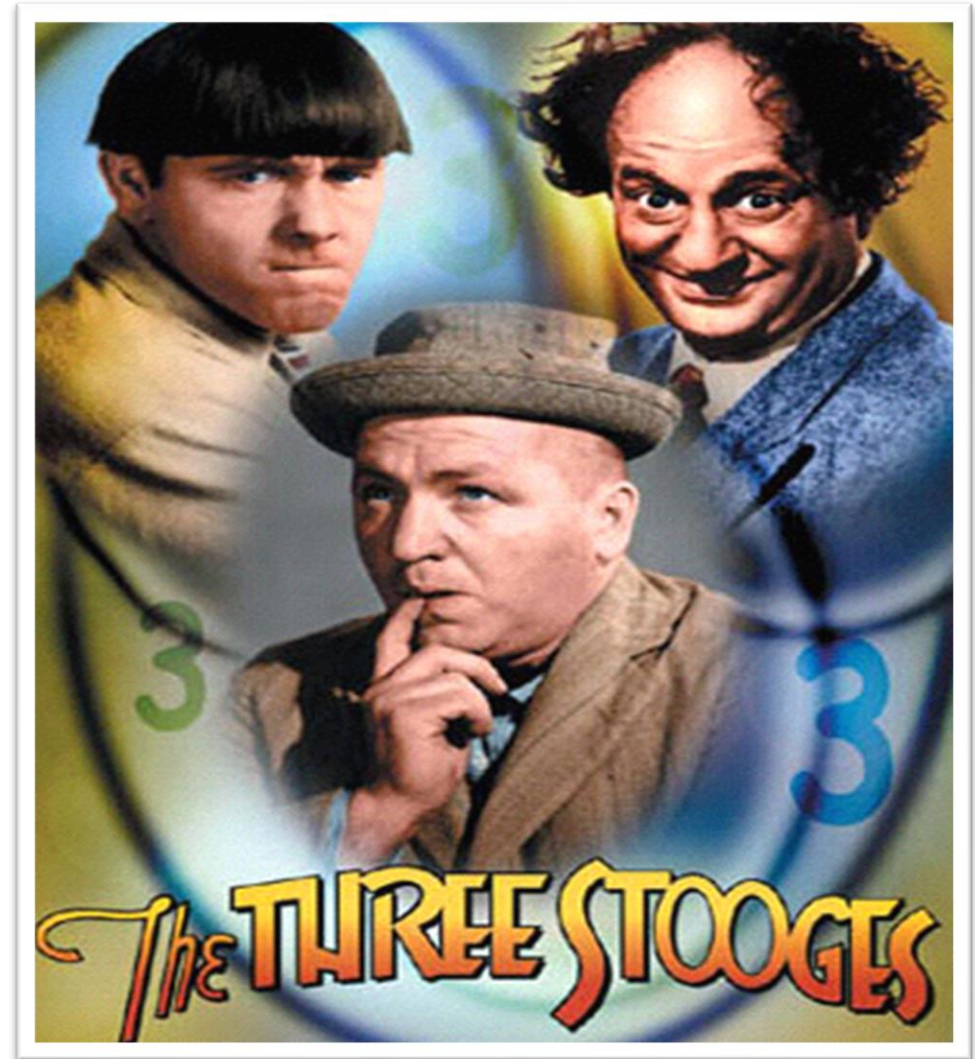
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Gangster Movies

- 1930's: American panic over motion pictures.

- Local censorship boards: films "glorified gangsters or outlaws" and "showed disrespect for law enforcement"

But…

- Not all portrayals of violence are problematic

- It depends on the context

Possible Effects of Media Violence

- Aggressive behavior and violence towards others

- Suicidal behavior

- Risk-taking behaviors
  - Sexual promiscuity and assault
  - Substance abuse (drugs, alcohol and tobacco)
  - Antisocial behavior

- Post-Traumatic and Acute Stress Disorders

- Other emotional reactions: fear, nightmares, depression

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Problems with Media Research

- Too few or non-representative subjects

- Laboratory settings don't simulate real world and pose only brief exposure

- Poor controlling for types of exposure; specifics of aggression and antisocial behavior; psychiatric status of subjects; social variables

- Confusion of cause and effect

- Confusion of association with causation

- Inappropriate statistical analyses

What Can We Do?

What Parents and Caregivers Can Do?

- Think Developmentally: What is appropriate for preschool, school-age, middle school and high school kids

- Have ongoing conversations: Ask open ended questions. What makes it so much fun?

- Know what your kids are using in digital media

- Set limits on times and formats for using media: phones, texts, apps, websites: amount of screen time, limit blue light at night

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What Can Parents and Caregivers Do?

- Consult trusted resources, such as Common Sense Media

- For younger kids, use parental controls

- Prohibition only fosters misuse

- Do not invade privacy: checking up and looking at phones is not a good idea. BUILD TRUST!

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What Can Parents and Caregivers Do?

- Play videogames with your kids. You need to see what they are doing.

- Go online with them. Go to various sites they visit and help them show you what they are doing.

- If you have older siblings, enlist their advice and support.

- Consult with trusted friends, relatives, mentors, community and spiritual leaders. If stuck get a psychiatric evaluation.

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Media Literacy: What Healthcare Providers Can Do

- We need to be more attentive to the range of media used by youth and the evidence for positive and negative impact

- The importance of a MEDIA COMPONENT in the Social History

  - What media devices are in the home and where?
  - Age of kids and access to media?
  - Parental use of media and availability to kids
  - Parental guidelines and limits on type, use, amount of media use for kids of different ages
  - Parental understanding of controls on devices
  - Referral to reliable websites for guidance

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Questions?

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Where to Turn to:

www.mghclaycenter.org

www.cyberbullying.org
www.marccenter.org
https://www.commonsensemedia.org/
StopBullying.gov

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