

Tips for Service Providers: Child & Youth Problematic Social Networking

Youth & Digital Technology: Growing Up Online Toolkit

- Build rapport and connect with the client to foster trust and encourage them to identify their strengths, skills, and resources.
- Review the Introduction and Social Networking sections of the “Growing Up Online Toolkit” to enhance understanding and guidance.
- Conduct a comprehensive assessment using a biopsychosocial approach to explore the client's relationship with social networking sites.
- Recognize that the use of social networking sites may be used as a coping mechanism to manage psychological stress.
- Use validated screening and assessment instruments to obtain a more detailed insight into concerns related to digital technology use.
- Ensure that certain assessment instruments are administered by appropriately trained professionals, such as psychologists, clinical social workers, or psychiatrists.
- Maintain cultural sensitivity and self-awareness when addressing social networking concerns, being mindful of personal biases and the client's unique experiences.
- Actively collaborate with the family to develop a treatment plan that fosters healthy digital habits.
- Consider the use of different modalities for treatment that you are trained in, such as psychoeducation, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), and Solution-Focused Therapy.
- Consider a consultation, and collaborate with colleagues; if necessary, contact: Addiction Helpline Recovery Alberta Youth Addiction Services at 1-866-332-2322 (toll free within Alberta). Mental health & addiction helplines | Recovery Alberta

A youth might say:	You might say:
My parents are always on Facebook posting photos and watching everyone else's lives.	When parents use social networking sites excessively, it may be more likely their children will too. Parents should be a responsible role model. What would you like to say to your parents?
My parents do not know what I am doing on the internet.	Your parents can help guide you on how to use social networking sites in a balanced way. What would you like your parents to know about what you are doing on the internet? Because social media is a powerful influence in the lives of children and youth, it is important to be informed on the online activities that your children are involved in and have ongoing discussions with them about some of the problems of social networking.

For more information, contact

informationandcyfistandards@recoveryalberta.ca

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<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page17564.aspx>

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Additional Tips for Service Providers:

1. Normalize and De-stigmatize the Conversation

- **Why it matters:** Many youth feel shame or guilt about their tech use. Reducing shame promotes openness.
- **What to say:** “It’s completely normal to rely on your phone or social media to stay connected. Let’s talk about how that helps you, and where it might be creating stress or imbalance.”

2. Use Visual Tools and Analogies

- **Tip:** Leverage infographics, videos, or worksheets (like from the *Growing Up Online Toolkit*) to make concepts easier to grasp.
- **What to say:** “Would it help if we mapped out your daily screen time to see patterns, just like a food journal helps track nutrition?”

3. Reframe the Focus from “Screen Time” to “Screen Quality”

- **Tip:** Not all digital use is harmful, focus on how and why they engage with social media.
- **What to say:** “Let’s think about what parts of your screen time feel helpful or meaningful, and which ones leave you feeling drained.”

4. Introduce the “Digital Wellbeing Spectrum”

- **Tip:** Explain that digital use falls on a spectrum from healthy to harmful, and changes depending on life stressors.
- **What to say:** “There are times in life when we lean more on technology. The goal isn’t perfection, it’s finding a better balance that works for *you*.”

5. Help Clients Set Personalized Digital Values

- **Tip:** Invite youth to reflect on how they *want* to use social media, instead of just focusing on restriction.
- **What to say:** “What do you want your relationship with social media to look like in six months? Let’s explore what matters most to you: creativity, connection, or maybe less comparison.”

6. Promote the “Tech-Health” Triangle

- **Tip:** Teach youth to reflect on the link between tech use, sleep, and mood.

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- **What to say:** “Let’s look at your sleep, stress, and screen habits as a triangle. If one side is off, it can affect the others. Which side feels strongest for you right now?”

7. Incorporate Youth Voice and Choice

- **Tip:** Let them co-create goals, limits, and alternative activities.
- **What to say:** “Would you be open to trying a 24-hour phone break as an experiment, not a punishment? You’d set the rules, and we’d debrief it together.”

8. Validate the Role of Online Identity

- **Tip:** Social media can be important for exploring identity and community, especially for marginalized youth.
- **What to say:** “Your online presence might be a space where you feel seen or creative, let’s protect what’s working while reducing what’s not.”

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