DIGITAL WELLNESS NETWORK

powered by EVERFI

Generation Z and Technology:

How teachers can improve students' digital health

INTRODUCTION

As smartphone access has grown more prevalent, so has the share of teens using the internet on a near-constant basis, according to a 2018 Pew Research Center survey. Nearly half (45%) said they use the internet "almost constantly," close to double the share (24%) who said the same in a 2014-2015 survey. Over this same period, access to smartphones among teens has grown more than 20 percentage points, from 73% to 95%.

OUR RESEARCH

To gain greater insight into the impact of growing technology use on the lives of Generation Z, EVERFI surveyed nearly 3,500 middle school students about the frequency of their internet use, their perspectives of the impact of technology on their lives, and their experiences with parent and teacher engagement on the topic of their online digital wellness.

The survey was conducted online from April 16th to April 29th, 2019, among middle school students prior to their completion of a course about digital wellness and safety. The final sample size of the survey is 3,493 and includes students from 44 states and the District of Columbia.

The survey was conducted by EVERFI, a leading education technology company that provides learners of all ages with education for the real world.

45%

OF TEENS SAID THEY USE THE INTERNET "ALMOST CONSTANTLY"
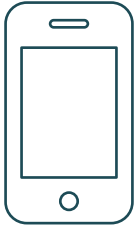
2018 Pew Research Center survey

95%

OF TEENS HAVE ACCESS TO A SMARTPHONE

2018 Pew Research Center survey

3 KEY FINDINGS

Here's what we found out about middle schoolers and their technology use:

1 Virtually all middle schoolers surveyed use the internet, with 22% spending five or more hours on social media daily. The top reasons cited for using the internet include for entertainment, to connect with others, or to do homework.

2 Students are largely positive about technology's impact on their lives, but are more ambivalent when it comes to social media. They say the most positive effects are making communication easier and keeping them informed, while the most negative effect is that it distracts from schoolwork. Many say they feel "bored" when they don't have access to technology.

3 Teachers play an important role in students' views of technology and their online well-being. Students who've had teachers talk to them about online safety are more likely to say that technology and social media have had a positive effect on their lives and are less likely to report getting in trouble for their technology use.

Students who've had teachers talk to them about online safety are more likely to say that technology and social media have had a positive effect on their lives.

① MIDDLE SCHOOLERS AND THE INTERNET

Virtually all middle schoolers surveyed use the internet, with 22% spending five or more hours on social media daily.

The internet is nearly ubiquitous in the lives of Generation Z. Virtually all (97%) surveyed students are online, and most are online for significant portions of a typical day. About 7 in 10 (69%) say they are online for at least three hours a day, almost half (47%) are online for at least five hours a day, and about 1 in 5 (19%) are online for more than eight hours a day. Overall, middle schoolers spend an average of five to six hours online per day.

Many of those online hours are spent on social media. Two in 5 (40%) spend at least three hours a day on social media, including 22% who spend at least five hours a day. On average, students spend three to four hours a day on social media.

Students spend time online for a variety of reasons. The majority spend time online for entertainment (79%), to connect with others through social media (65%), to do homework (60%), or to play video games (58%). Many also spend time online to get news and information (45%) or to share content they created (22%).

5-6 hrs
THE AVERAGE TIME SPENT BY MIDDLE SCHOOLERS ONLINE PER DAY

40%
OF MIDDLE SCHOOLERS SPEND AT LEAST THREE HOURS A DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Teens Use Tech for Entertainment, Social Media and Homework

Category	Percent
For entertainment (watching videos or movies, listening to music, etc.)	79%
To connect with others through social media	65%
To do homework	60%
To play video games	58%
To get news and information	45%
To share conrent/create	22%
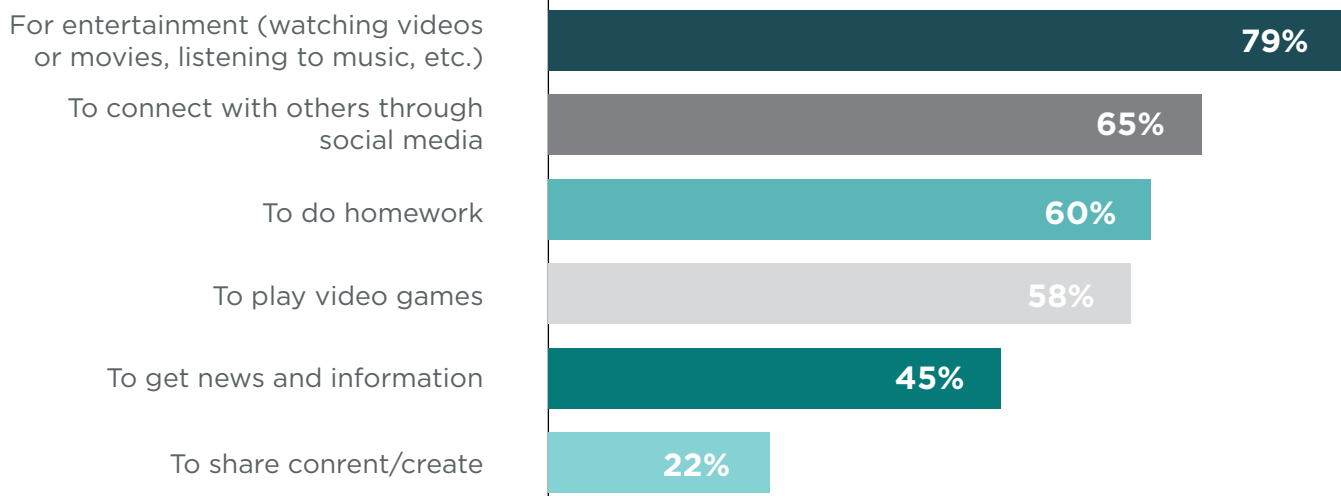
While 67% of students say technology has had a mostly positive impact on their lives, only 47% say the same about social media.

② IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

Students are largely positive about technology's impact on their lives, but are more middling when it comes to social media.

Very few students (7%) say that technology has had a negative impact on their lives, while two-thirds (67%) say it has had a positive impact. The remaining 26% say the impact has been neither positive nor negative. But when it comes to social media, students are more skeptical of its influence. Just 47% say the influence of social media has been mostly positive, while 12% say it has been mostly negative, and 41% say it has been neither positive nor negative. And when it comes to the amount of influence on their lives, about a quarter (26%) say social media has had too much influence, and 62% say it has had about the right amount of influence.

Students cite a wide variety of positive effects of technology, including:
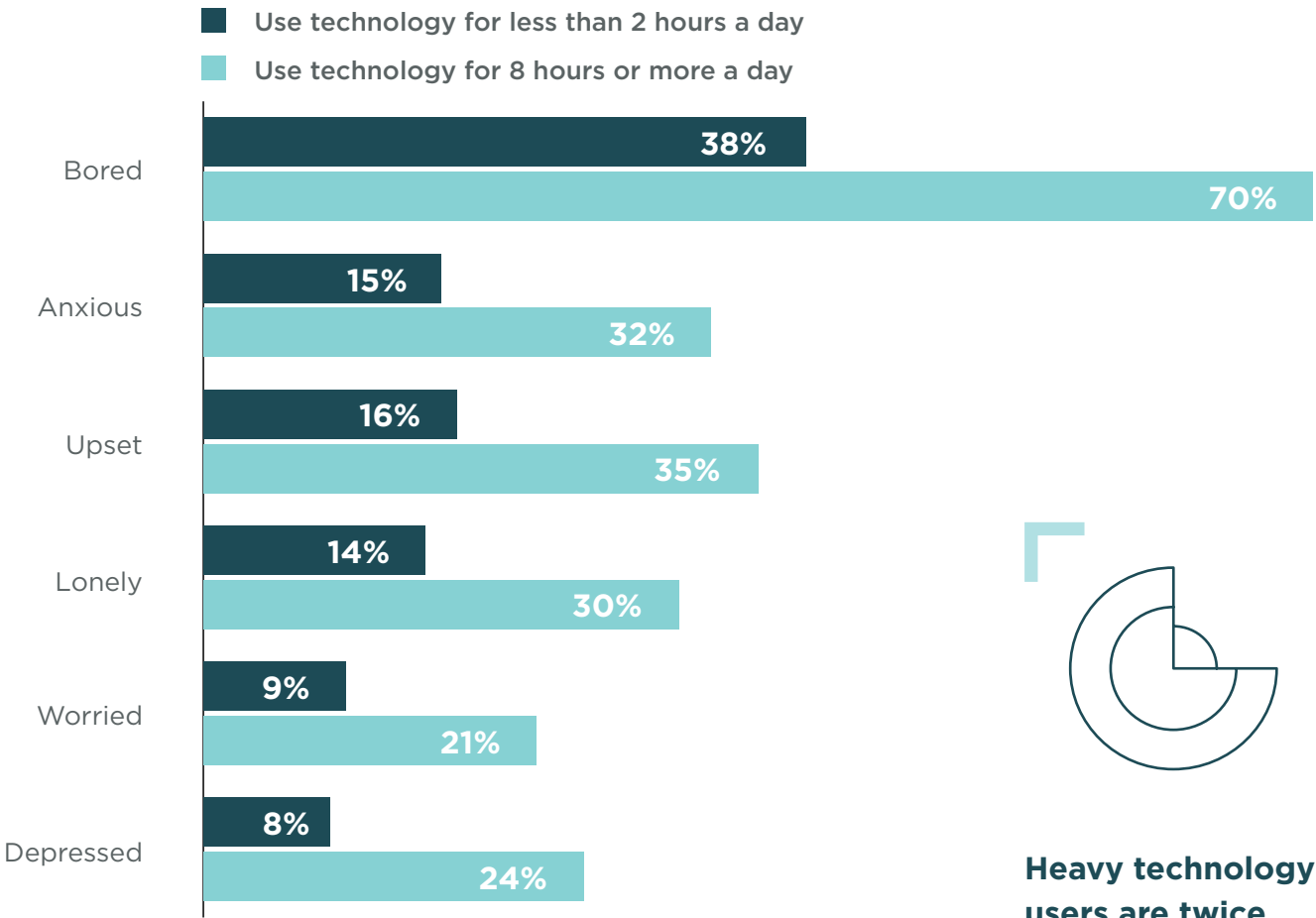
- making communication easier (75%)
- keeping them informed about what is going on (75%)
- helping to do schoolwork and research (71%)

The most commonly cited negative effect is that it distracts from schoolwork, but it's cited by a minority (45%) of respondents. The second-most commonly cited negative effect is that "it creates more drama," which is mentioned by 36% of students.

Negative impacts of technology can also be seen when students are asked how they feel when they do not have access to technology. Fully 60% of students say they feel "bored," which is the most-frequently cited response by a wide margin. The next most frequently-cited responses are also negative, including "anxious" (22%), "upset" (21%), or "lonely" (20%). Positive feelings, such as "focused" (19%), "happy" (17%), or relieved (14%) are mentioned relatively infrequently.

Teens Who Use Technology Frequently Report More Negative Feelings When They Do Not Have Access

How do you feel when you do NOT have access to technology? (Select all that apply)

■ Use technology for less than 2 hours a day
■ Use technology for 8 hours or more a day

Bored
- 38%
- 70%

Anxious
- 15%
- 32%

Upset
- 16%
- 35%

Lonely
- 14%
- 30%

Worried
- 9%
- 21%

Depressed
- 8%
- 24%

Negative feelings are most prevalent among students who use technology the most. Those who say they are online for at least eight hours a day are nearly twice as likely as those who are online for less than two hours a day to say they are "bored" without access to technology (70% vs. 38%). They are also at least twice as likely to say they are "anxious," "upset," "lonely," "worried," and "depressed."

Heavy technology users are twice as likely to report feeling "lonely" when they don't have access to technology than less frequent technology users.

3   THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

Teachers play an important role in students' views of technology and their online well-being.

Students who have had teachers talk to them about online safety are more likely to say that technology and social media have had a positive effect on their lives and are less likely to report getting in trouble for their technology use.

Most students say that parents and/or teachers talk to them about safety and appropriate behavior online, with teachers slightly more likely to do so. About 4 in 5 (81%) students say their teachers have talked to them about online safety, compared to 76% who say their parents have. Similarly, about three-quarters (77%) of students say their teachers have talked to them about appropriate online behavior towards others, compared to 73% who say their parents have done the same.

More than three-quarters (77%) of students say their teachers have talked to them about appropriate online behavior, compared to 73% who say their parents have.

More Than 7 in 10 Students Report Their Teachers and Parents Have Talked to Them About Online Safety

Teachers ■   Parents ■

	Teachers	Parents
Talked to you about online safety	81%	76%
Talked to you about appropriate online behavior towards others	77%	73%
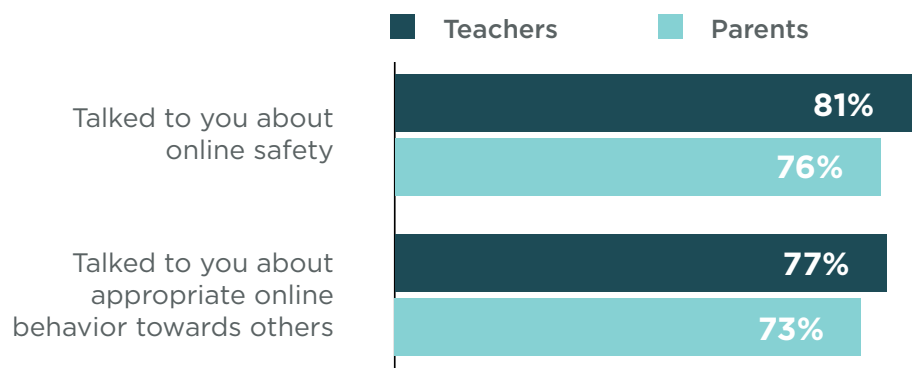
Teachers are also notably more likely than parents to limit technology use or restrict access to online content, but parents are more likely to take away technology as a form of punishment. About three-quarters (77%) of students say a teacher has limited the amount of time they can spend online, compared to 50% who say a parent has done the same.

Similarly, 72% of students say that a teacher has restricted the websites or content they can view online, compared to 43% who say a parent has done the same. However, 71% of students say a parent has taken away their cell phone or internet privileges as a form of punishment, compared to 56% who say a teacher has done this.

Those students who have had a teacher talk to them about online safety are more likely to report technology and social media having a positive affect on their lives. Among students who say a teacher has talked to them about online safety, 69% say technology has had a positive impact on their life, compared to 62% of students who have not had a teacher speak with them. Similarly 49% of students who have had a teacher speak with them say social media has had a mostly positive impact, compared to 41% of students who say a teacher has not spoken with them.

Students with teachers who talk to them about online safety are also less likely to have had a teacher or parent take away technology as a form of punishment. Among this group of students, 36% say a teacher has taken away technology, compared to 62% of students who have not had a teacher speak with them. And among students who have had a teacher speak with them, 59% say a parent has taken away technology as a form of punishment, compared to 75% of students who have not had a teacher speak with them.
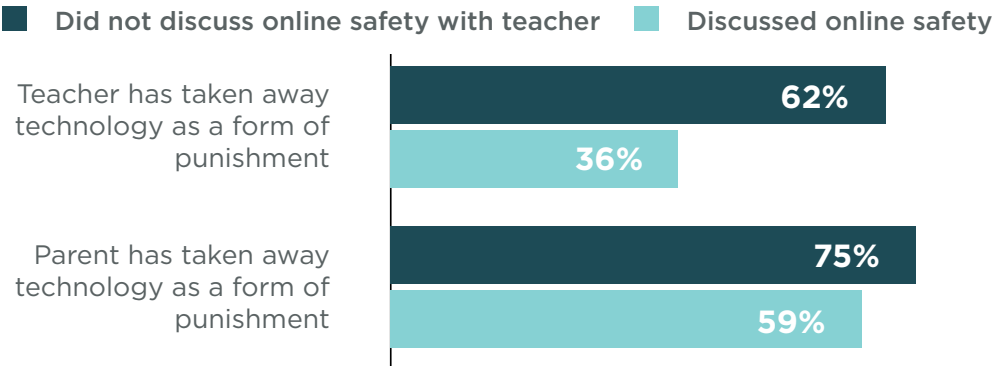
49%
OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE HAD A TEACHER SPEAK WITH THEM SAY SOCIAL MEDIA HAS HAD A MOSTLY POSITIVE IMPACT.

41%
OF STUDENTS WHO SAY A TEACHER HAS **NOT** SPOKEN WITH THEM SAY SOCIAL MEDIA HAS HAD A MOSTLY POSITIVE IMPACT.

Students Who Have Had A Teacher Speak to Them About Online Safety Are Less Likely to Have Gotten in Trouble for Technology Use

■ Did not discuss online safety with teacher　■ Discussed online safety

Teacher has taken away technology as a form of punishment
- Did not discuss online safety with teacher: 62%
- Discussed online safety: 36%

Parent has taken away technology as a form of punishment
- Did not discuss online safety with teacher: 75%
- Discussed online safety: 59%

CONCLUSION

The ubiquitous presence of technology in students' lives comes with a need to mitigate its negative effects through proactive education.

Generation Z is known as the first full generation of "digital natives." Growing up with unrivaled access to technology, students say the impact on their lives has been mostly positive, giving them the ability to do a range of activities from accessing entertainment, to connecting with others on social media, to doing homework.

But the near constant presence of technology in their lives also comes with a need to mitigate its negative effects through proactive education so they can utilize it effectively and positively. The data in this survey show that teachers can play a vital role by providing their students with education and skills related to digital wellness and safety. Students with teachers who have talked to them about online safety report more positive outcomes, including a more positive view of technology and social media, and fewer negative outcomes, including the frequency at which technology has been taken away as a form of punishment.

Future research on Generation Z and technology may dive deeper on the topics of why students spend time online, as well as some of the negative impacts reported by students when they do not have access to technology.

ABOUT EVERFI

EVERFI is the leading education technology company that provides learners of all ages with education for the real world, through innovative and scalable digital learning. We have trained more than 16 million learners in critical skill areas.

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