



TIP SHEET 2: Using screens for social connection in light of the COVID-19 pandemic

1) Encourage Screen-Use for Social Connection

The physical isolation associated with COVID-19 is an incredibly difficult aspect of children's lives, especially for teenagers. Meaningful child-to-child social connections are thought to be protective against withdrawal and depression.

As Term 2 starts, many children are starting to tire of connecting with their friends online. The reality is that whilst social isolation is easing, children are still going to be seeing friends less in Term 2. Given face-to-face contact will be less frequent, it is important that parents encourage children to connect with their friends online.

Be flexible with children's screen use for social purposes – remember children are accustomed to being at school with their friends for 6-7 hours per day, and this has reduced substantially.

2) Chat to your Child

Socialising whilst in isolation should be encouraged as much as possible. Young people are missing being able to sit in groups with their friends, hug, and show physical affection. Make sure you check in with your child as to how lonely or disconnected he/she has been feeling. Tell them that you understand how difficult the situation is, and if your child is experiencing difficulty connecting, talk collaboratively with them about a plan to help.

3) Trust your Child & Give Privacy

Children need to be able to talk openly with one another, particularly teens. If you are monitoring their every move, they may feel they cannot open up to their friends – which is problematic as their friends at this time are playing an important role helping them to process the stress in their lives.

Ensure children can communicate with their friends in a private setting unless there have been major breaches of trust in the past.

4) Mix it up

It's not very healthy for a child of any age to be on a device for hours on end. Talk to your child about taking breaks and healthy time limits for social interactions with friends.

5) Encourage Communication by Phone & Video

Children and teenagers are likely to have more rich meaningful interactions if they connect using virtual video or phone as compared to using text messages. Help your child understand how to use applications such as Facetime, Houseparty, and Zoom with friends.

If your child is connecting with their friends by an addictive medium that leads to a DIP in his/her dopamine (e.g., snapchat), encourage him/her to shift to using a different medium for communication.

6) Memorable & Meaningful Virtual Interactions

Many children and teenagers are starting to feel bored with connecting virtually.

Help your child think outside the square about how to have more meaningful, enjoyable and unique interactions online. This could include things like Netflix party, online quizzes, online Pictionary, problem solving games (like hang man), and virtual yoga or bootcamps.

See if you can adapt your child's interests for an online experience. If they enjoy playing guitar, encourage him/her to do it online with friends and learn new songs that way.

7) Build Confidence with Online & Phone

Many children communicate with one another solely through text or chat features on social media, and it is common for many kids to have limited experience of using phones or video communication. This is a great time to start to help your child to work on these issues. If your child is fearful of using the phone or video, help them develop confidence gradually using a [stepladder plan](#). This involves developing a series of challenges to help your child build confidence in approaching feared situations.

8) Don't take away Social Interactions for Misbehaviour

When delivering consequences for misbehaviour at this time, try and avoid taking away your child's opportunities to connect with their friends virtually as these connections are so important to their sustained growth at this time.

9) Limit chats with friends around bedtime

Always ensure that chats with friends are turned off at a decent hour so that your child gets a good night's sleep.

10) Talk to teens about sexting & online safety

Sexting is relatively common amongst teenagers. Even though it can be an uncomfortable subject, it is important to explore your child views on sexting, and fill in any gaps they may have in knowledge on the subject.

Relevant and important information can be found on the following [website](#). Other helpful and relevant information can also be found on the [e-safety website](#).

In case of an emergency call "000" or go directly to the Emergency Department of your nearest hospital.
For after-hours advice call the mental health line on 1800 011 511

You may also access assistance at:

<https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace/>
<https://kidshelpline.com.au/get-help/phone-counselling>
Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636)
Lifeline Australia (13 11 14)
Mens Line (1300 78 99 78)
Suicide Call Back Service (1300 659 467)
<https://www.psychology.org.au/Find-a-Psychologist>
<https://acpa.org.au/find-a-clinical-psychologist/>
<https://parentworks.org.au/#/>
<https://covid19chilledandconsiderate.com>

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