



Youth and Media

7 tips for educators in the digital age



THE MANNERHEIM LEAGUE
FOR CHILD WELFARE

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For educators

Media is part of the lives of young people in many ways. The internet, social media, games, television and other media content and platforms are part of the growth environment of young people. Parents and educators may ponder how they can support and develop the media skills of young people and a balanced, responsible use of media. Adults do not have to know everything there is to know about the internet, games or the latest applications. However,

expressing interest and a desire to understand how young people use media is needed.

This brochure deals with questions relating to the media usage of young people in grades 7–9, in particular. ‘Media’ means both traditional and digital forms of media and content.

What topic relating to media use will you talk about with your teenager today?

1

Become familiar with how your teenager uses media

Every young person has their own way of using media. It is therefore important that you become familiar with the applications, games and content that your adolescent uses. Do you know what your teenager most enjoys doing with media?

Media is used in various ways for finding information, interaction, self-expression, learning and entertainment. The internet, social media and games can be used to reinforce friendships, make new friends, follow role models, explore personal identity and receive peer support. Active media users may produce their own media content and influence and contribute to matters that are important to them.

For young people, social media services and game environments can be one place among others where they spend time with friends and new acquaintances, relax and engage in hobbies. Conversations are held using instant messaging software, games, discussion forums and social media platforms, often in private groups where communication can be quick and spontaneous.

Include the adolescent's experiences online, in games and with other media in your casual day-to-day talk and catching up. Ask and listen with an open mind to what is important or enjoyable to them, what they are interested in online or how media is used among their friends.

Adult attitudes often determine how a young person will describe personal experiences. Online environments can be important to the adolescent and you should not downplay their experiences. When online experiences are an everyday topic of discussion, it is often easier for the adolescent to also approach an adult if they experience anything negative on the internet.

Open, positive dialogue supports the growth and media skills of a young person. You should also show your teenager that you appreciate their knowledge and skills. You can ask for help with your media use and let them teach you. It is essential for a young person to receive positive feedback, and positive encouragement can be given on media skills.

Have a talk with your teenager

- What does the teenager most enjoy doing on the internet or on their phone?
- What are their favourite games like? Why?
- Which apps, gaming communities and social media services are important to your teenager? What do they do there and with whom?
- In what situations and for what purposes do they prefer to use media?
- Where does the adolescent search for and obtain information?
- Who does the teenager follow online? Whose life are they interested in?
- How could the parent support the teenager's use of media?

2

Support your teenager's media skills

Media skills develop in interaction with friends, family and other media users. The more familiar you are with the media your teen uses and their habits of using the internet, the better support you can provide for them both with their concerns and in creating balanced daily routines.

Films, TV series, games and videos, for instance, provide young people with tools to explore themselves, their identity and the world as well as share experiences with peers. Games and social media provide ways to try out various roles and improve their teamwork skills and behaviour in communities.

There are more and more sources of information available in the digital age. Because of this, the ability to identify and interpret various types of content and their objectives and ways of influencing you is crucial. You should talk to your adolescent about the kind of critical approach that media requires. Make sure that the adolescent has access to reliable, versatile information on topics that interest them as well as positive peer support. Young people have the right to take part and obtain information via media.

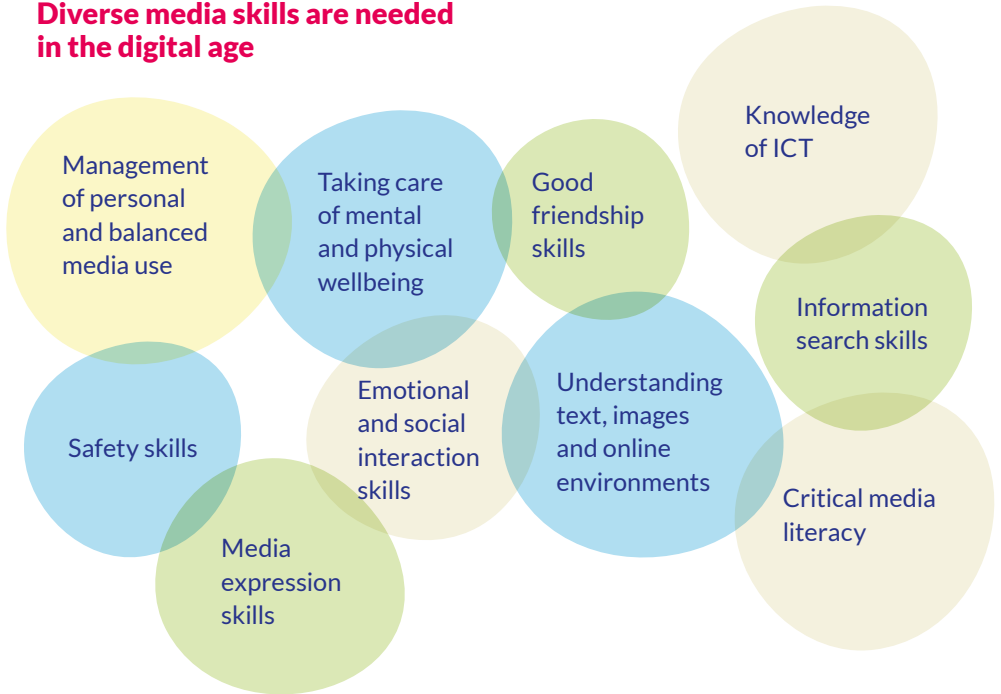
Media can be a hobby for a young person. It can involve e.g. gaming, photography, making videos, programming or other digital activities or expression. Media skills are often useful in studies. For some young people, media skills can also develop into key competencies required in their future profession.

Media education is part of day-to-day upbringing

There are many ways in which adults at home can support a young person's media skills, which are learned by doing, thinking about and trying out things together. The use of media



Diverse media skills are needed in the digital age



often requires the same skills that are also needed in other areas of life. Young people cannot learn these skills on their own, but they need parental support. Which skills are the most important in your opinion?

Have a talk with your teenager

- Which of your teenager's media skills are you especially proud of?
- Which media skills does the teen feel confident about?
- In what areas does the teenager need support?
- In the teen's opinion, what should the parent know about media use, gaming or the internet?
- What could you learn from your teen? What could you teach them?

3

Discuss a balanced digital life

Media and the digital culture are an integral part of the life of young people in many ways.

The flood of sensory stimuli requires the skill to manage media use and the ability to concentrate. Many games and social media apps are designed to encourage people to spend as much time with them as possible.

A developing, growing adolescent needs adult support to take care of personal wellbeing. Wellbeing is supported by e.g. getting enough quality sleep, regular exercise and meals, meaningful hobbies and meeting people face-to-face. How media is used and what it is used for are essential elements to wellbeing. Discuss what activities you think are passive, active or positive.

The management of time and media use is not always straightforward or easy for young people, nor is it for adults. Anticipation, or the habits and skills used to manage media use, is crucial. You should have a talk with the adolescent about how the use of smart devices can affect e.g. the use of time, sleep, studies and hobbies, exercise and friendships and family relations. Support the adolescent's skills to manage their time and find meaningful, positive things to do. It is

important to remember moderation in media use as well.

Teenagers may spend a lot of time on the internet, because it is the place where their important friends are. New friendships can also be formed online. Talk about how the adolescent has found online friends and what they have in common. You can also discuss whether the interaction or friendship causes pressure to participate or be present.

Remind them that although smart devices make it easy to always be available, this is not a must. Encourage them to also spend time with peers face-to-face. You should support the friendships of the teenager offline as well as online.

Motives for media use and time management

Encourage your teenager to observe how media use affects them and the people close to them. How does it make them feel? What needs does the adolescent meet with the use of media, gaming or watching series or films? Do they do it for entertainment, to engage in a hobby, to learn, to spend time with friends, to relax? And is media use, in the young person's opinion, sometimes just a way of "idling away" their time to e.g. avoid something negative, such as loneliness or boredom?

Take care of at least the following:

- Getting enough sleep
- Place where the mobile phone is parked at night
- Taking care of schoolwork, housework and other duties
- Outdoor activities and exercise
- Family agreements for the use of smart devices
- Taking breaks from screens
- Meeting friends and other people face-to-face, spending family time
- Ergonomics, such as good workspaces and changing positions



If you are concerned about them spending too much time with media, find a suitable moment to bring up the subject. Calmly talk to the teenager about what they find fascinating in media and how you could try to build more balanced daily routines and find versatile activities. Help the adolescent to practise the skills to manage media use and focus only on what they need at the time.

Young people are different and need the kind of support that works best for them. Some need discussions while others need activities and actions or a stronger adult presence in day-to-day life management.

Sometimes it may be difficult to stop e.g. playing a game or using a smart device despite agreements and requests to do so, and the adolescent needs help from an adult to take breaks, start doing something

else and take care of their duties.

Encourage the adolescent to observe how media use affects their personal wellbeing, moods, school and closest relationships.

Have a talk with your teenager

- What does the teen think about their media use?
- How do they feel it affects their life, friendships and family relations or school?
- What activities do they find meaningful?
- In their opinion, what is the appropriate amount of time per day to spend with media or playing a game? How about the parent's opinion?
- What aspects of media use does the teen feel are useful or enjoyable, and what are harmful?

4

Agreements make for a smoother life

Common agreements for media use, such as using smart devices or gaming, may be needed to make sure that everyday life runs smoothly and includes versatile activities.

It is often easier to follow agreements when they have been prepared and justified together with the teenager. Agree on the times, situations and places at home where media is not used. For instance, are mealtimes, travels or visits to other people's homes kept free from smart devices? Media-free situations or times can also be family agreements or challenges that are taken together.

You can make life easier by identifying, with the adolescent, which things are non-negotiable, such as sleep, and which are negotiable and flexible. Media use should not be a hindrance to taking care of school work or other duties. It is also important to make time for exercise and meeting people in real life. If the discussion about rules turns into an argument, it may be necessary to spend more positive quality time together and do things with your teenager in day-to-day life. If media use is limited as a punishment, this may cause more conflict.

If you are concerned about something in the adolescent's media use, calmly voice your concerns and provide a reason for them. Do not read the teenager's

messages without permission unless you have a particularly good reason to do so. Sometimes young people may hesitate to tell an adult about negative experiences, because they fear that the device will be taken away from them. In terms of agreeing on media use and supporting the wellbeing and skills of the adolescent, you should try to understand the significance of media use to the teenager.

Talk to other educators about the media-related issues that their families are dealing with. You might want to share good practices. But try to remember that every adolescent is unique, and different methods work for different families. Also take part in the dialogue with your adolescent's school and hobby community on how to work together to support adolescents towards responsible media use.

Have a talk with your teenager

- What media use routines and agreements are there in your family? Why?
- Who do the agreements concern? Who have been involved in making the rules or establishing the common routines?
- How can the media use of family members and other people close to you affect the others?
- In the teenager's opinion, what routines and agreements would work in our family?
- What should be taken into consideration in terms of family members of different ages?



Age ratings of games and audiovisual media

Observe the age ratings. This supports safe media use. The age ratings of films, television programmes and digital games are based on the law and give a warning of any content that is detrimental to the development of underage children. The law is absolute

when it comes to the public viewing of content assigned the highest age limit, 18. It is important to also remember this at home.

Have a talk with your teenager

- What do the age ratings means?
- How do games or films affect your mood or how you feel?

Television programmes and films



Digital games



5

You set an example

The ways in which young people use media may differ greatly from adults. Even so, it is important for a parent and educator to keep in mind that they set an example to the adolescent with their personal media use. How may it appear to an adolescent? How much time do I spend online or using smart devices? How emotionally available am I when I do this? How does my media use affect our daily routines as a family?

From time to time, stop and consider your habitual ways of using various media. Think about how you behave with others online, in real life and in various situations where smart devices are present. Describing your habits as a user also allows you, as a parent, to open up a discussion about media use with the teenager.

By setting an example, you can teach your teenager considerate use of the internet and how to publish things responsibly. Take the teen's opinion into account and remember to ask for their permission if you are about to post a picture or information about them online, on your social media channels for example.

Have a talk with your teenager

- What does the teen think of your media use?
- What is similar in your ways of using the media, what is different?
- What do you enjoy doing when you spend time with media or games or online?
- How do you think your teen will answer the same question?
- Have you asked for the teen's permission to post photos or updates online about them?





6

Positive and safe encounters

Interaction and social relations with other people are often strongly related to the media use of young people. The internet, games and social media are important ways to stay in contact with friends and meet new people. It is important to also support friendship skills in online environments. Talk with the adolescent and set rules about how internet friends can be met safely if the adolescent has made friends online and wants to meet them in real life.

Encourage positive interaction

Talk together about how the environments of the internet or social media affect friendships and the interaction between people. How do the unwritten or self-evident rules or norms that exist in various internet groups affect people's behaviour? Discuss what the messages or conversations are like in the channels and message threads that the teenager uses. Is someone left out? What kind of tone is used when discussing group members versus those outside the group? What kinds of conversations do gamers have in the heat of the game?

Teach the teen to put themselves in someone else's position. Encourage them to respect their own and other people's boundaries, also on

the internet. Small, considerate acts can also be performed online to create positive encounters and behave responsibly. Remind the adolescent that they are worth much more than the number of likes or followers that they could ever get online.

Take cyberbullying seriously

Bullying or hurtful behaviour should not be accepted on the internet either. Remind the adolescent that content that offends or insults others should never be shared online or in groups.

Cyberbullying includes hurtful, threatening or humiliating messages, the spreading of false rumours, excluding someone from groups and spreading secretly filmed or unauthorized content and personal information. Cyberbullying cases may be associated with bullying in school or in hobby groups. Anyone can be guilty of cyberbullying, either intentionally or unthinkingly.

Encourage the adolescent to talk about any negative experiences. If the adolescent tells you about hurtful behaviour, harassment or cyberbullying, take it seriously. Be a supportive adult and be ready to calmly address the bullying: what has happened, in which environments and who were involved. Save any hurtful content and



messages e.g. as screenshots. You may want to notify the administration of the service of the offensive content. You should block the bully or person harassing the adolescent or remove them from the contacts.

Pay attention to the bullied adolescent's wishes on what would help them in the situation. All incidents of bullying should be resolved with the parties involved, such as the school, hobby group, the other adolescents and their guardians. In serious cases, you should turn to the police. Remember to thank the teenager for speaking up and not dealing with the situation alone.

Have a talk with your teenager

- In the teen's opinion, what things and acts count as cyberbullying? How about the parent's opinion?
- Has the teenager seen or come across bullying?
- In which environments does bullying occur and how common is it, in the teen's opinion?
- Does the teenager know what to do if they or a friend is bullied online? Discuss what would be the best course of action in the situation.
- How, in the teen's opinion, could cyberbullying best be prevented?



Sexuality on the internet

Getting to know more about sexuality is a natural part of life as a young person. Young people often search for information about sexuality on the internet. Make sure that the teenager has access to reliable information. Encourage the teenager to question e.g. the stereotypes and norms for appearance displayed in media or social media.

Does something on the internet create pressure or expectations to be something or behave in a certain way? Remind the adolescent that nobody on the internet can pressure anyone into

doing something that they do not want to do. Sometimes the messages between teenagers or dating partners may include sexual content or conversations. Young people should carefully consider whether it is wise to share their intimate photos and videos. If an adult approaches an underage child on the internet to take advantage of them, their behaviour is illegal.

The age limit of pornographic material is 18 years. Porn rarely provides a truthful picture of what sex or intimacy is or what people generally like. Safety and taking things slow are key values when exploring one's sexuality.

Boost the teen's self-esteem and the ability to clearly refuse, if contacts or content shared by others online feel unpleasant or confusing. Harassment should not be tolerated. Be prepared to have conversations and be a safe adult whom the adolescent can talk to, also about matters relating to sexuality.

Have a talk with your teenager

- Does sexual content spread in the online channels used by the teenager? How do people react to such content?
- Has the teenager seen or experienced sexual harassment on the internet, in games or elsewhere?
- What did they think about it and how did they respond to the situation?
- How can you know who to trust online?
- What is the wise course of action when dealing with strangers?

Personal data on the internet

The publicity and privacy of various media environments should be discussed together. How can different services be used safely and responsibly? What things or pictures does the adolescent share about themselves, their friends or their family? What does the teenager think about privacy and publicity and how is this reflected in their use of the internet?

It is a good idea to become familiar with data protection and the terms and conditions of apps and services together and find out how and for what purpose they collect user data. Some services have a section or site for parents and educators describing safety and privacy, which is worth reading.

Have a talk with your teenager

- What things, information and photos are private? Why?
- How can you guarantee safety on the internet?
- In the teen's opinion, what things, information and photos of themselves and others can be shared publicly online?
- How can they ensure safety and privacy online for themselves and for their friends and other people?

7

Have fun together

You learn a lot by experiencing things together. Positive moments together are important to a teenager as well. Parents often play games with small children. How about playing games with your teenager as well? Share the best news or most interesting articles of the day with each other. Ask your teenager to tell you about their favourite series, apps or social media channels that they follow. You can also share things that interest you.

Try making videos together, setting up a website relating to your hobby or doing something fun online that interests both of you. At the same time, you will both learn diverse media skills and also think about questions concerning e.g. publishing content. In addition to dealing with practical matters, family message groups can also be used to bring joy to others in many ways and show the teenager that they are important and the parent is thinking about them.

Have a talk with your teenager

- How would they like to spend time together?
- What kinds of things would the teen like to do together with media?

Useful websites

nuortennetti.fi
mediataitokoulu.fi
nettivihje.fi
someturva.fi
media-avain.fi
mediakasvatus.fi
pelikasvatus.fi
pelitaito.fi





More information

Support for the media education of children and young people of varying ages and more information about media use is available in Vanhempainnetti by MLL (in Finnish).

mll.fi/lapsetjamedia
mll.fi/mediakasvatus

Tell your teenager about Nuortennetti by MLL, which provides peer support, information and help with various questions (in Finnish).
nuortennetti.fi

Invite an MLL instructor to hold a parents' evening or lesson or provide other media education training. mll.fi/tilaakouluttaja

If you are concerned about an adolescent's media use, you can also contact the free MLL Parents' Helpline, chat or online letter service in Finnish.

Parents' Helpline, tel. 0800 922 77,
Mon 10 am–1 pm and 5–8 pm, Tue 10 am–1 pm and 5–8 pm, Wed 10 am–1 pm, Thu 2–8 pm

Vanhempainnetti letter service and chat mll.fi/vanhempainnetti

Child and Youth Phone, tel. 116 111,
Mon–Fri 2–8 pm and Sat–Sun 5–8 pm

The Child and Youth Chat is available Sun–Wed 5–8 pm.

You can write to the letter service at any time. nuortennetti.fi/lasten-ja-nuorten-puhelin

Child and Youth Phone in Swedish:
ung.mll.fi

Media education is part of day-to-day upbringing. There are many ways in which adults at home can support the media skills and digital wellbeing of an adolescent. Media, games and the internet often require the same skills that are needed in other areas of life as well.

This brochure describes the media culture of young people and the ways in which parents can guide adolescents towards safe, responsible media use.

mll.fi/mediakasvatus



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