

The impact of media on young people

Some of the latest research on media in the lives of young people in the USA has major insights for parents, children and youth leaders. These may resonate with experience on this side of the Atlantic.

Pew Internets' researcher Amanda Lenhart released a helpful little presentation about the [Impact of Technology on the Lives of American Teens](#). See:

<http://pewinternet.org/Presentations/2011/Apr/From-Texting-to-Twitter.aspx>

In this little slideshow, Lenhart tries to cut through the hype and get straight to the facts about exactly how media saturated Americans are.

Here are some of the specifics you might find noteworthy from her study. It is a great summary about how plugged in teenagers are today:

- 93% of teenagers 12-17 are online—the largest percentage of any age group.
- Only 8% of families with teens have no computer, and only 4% of homes with computers don't have access to Internet.
- 80% of teens 12-17 own a game console.
- 75% of all teens have a cell phone.
- A typical teen sends about 50 texts per day.
- Most teen cell phone users make 1-5 calls per day.
- 31% of teens who take their phones to school send text messages every day during class time.
- 73% of teens are on social Internet sites (like Facebook).
- Only 8% of teens use Twitter (compared to 37% of 18-24 year-olds—the largest percentage of any age group).
- 14% of teens now blog, compared to 28% in 2006.

The American Academy of Pediatrics released a report in August of 2010 titled, [Sexuality, Contraception, and the Media](#). The doctors in this report shared some pretty shocking facts about the effects of media on young people. Here's just a glimpse:

- More than 75% of prime-time programs contain sexual content.
- Only 14% of these incidents mention any risks or responsibilities of sexual activity.
- Talk about sex on TV can occur as often as 8 to 10 times per hour.
- Between 1997 and 2001 alone, the amount of sexual content on TV nearly doubled.
- Listening to sexually degrading lyrics is associated with earlier sexual intercourse.

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Out of nine longitudinal studies seeking to answer whether sexy media contributes to early sexual activity, seven of these studies have shown that exposure to sexual content in TV and other media in early adolescence can as much as double the risk of early sexual intercourse.

Early exposure to sexual content doubled the risk of teen pregnancy.

Bedroom TVs are associated with greater substance use and sexual activity by teenagers.

Research is clear that parents need to take an active role in talking with their kids about media guidelines, and setting up realistic media guidelines. This report actually offers some great advice to parents, including limiting screen time, prohibiting media in bedrooms, and “co-viewing” media with kids.