

Robbie's Hope TECHNOLOGY HANDBOOK

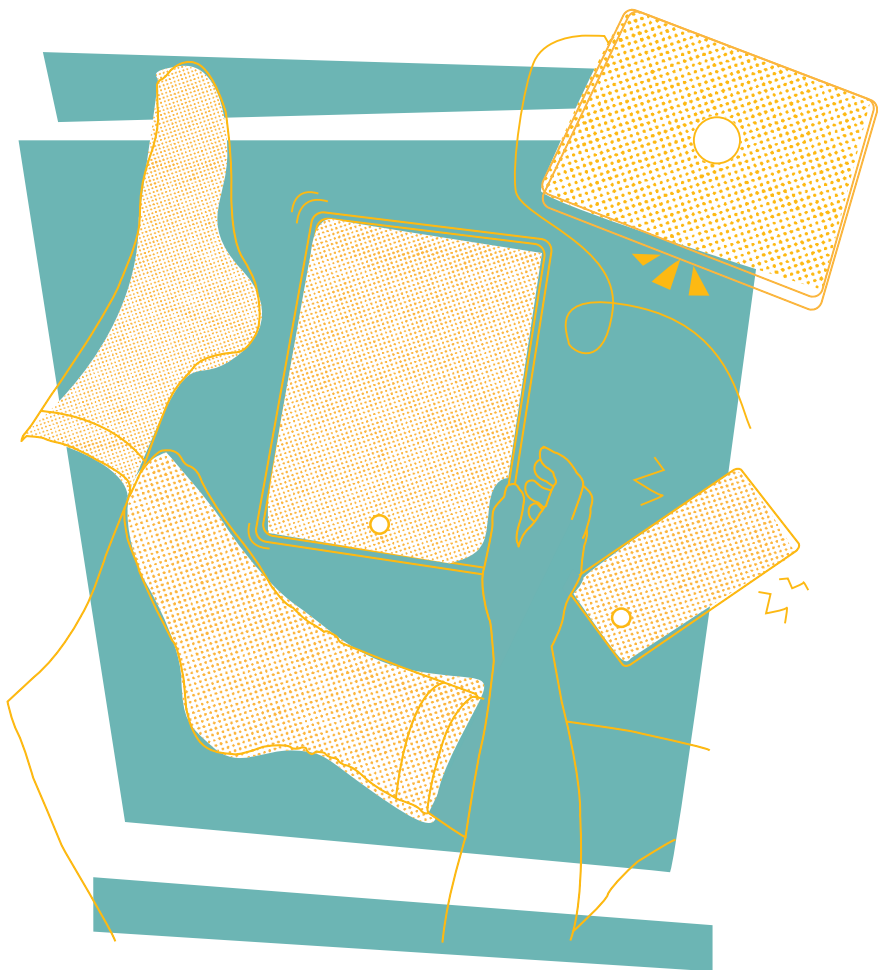


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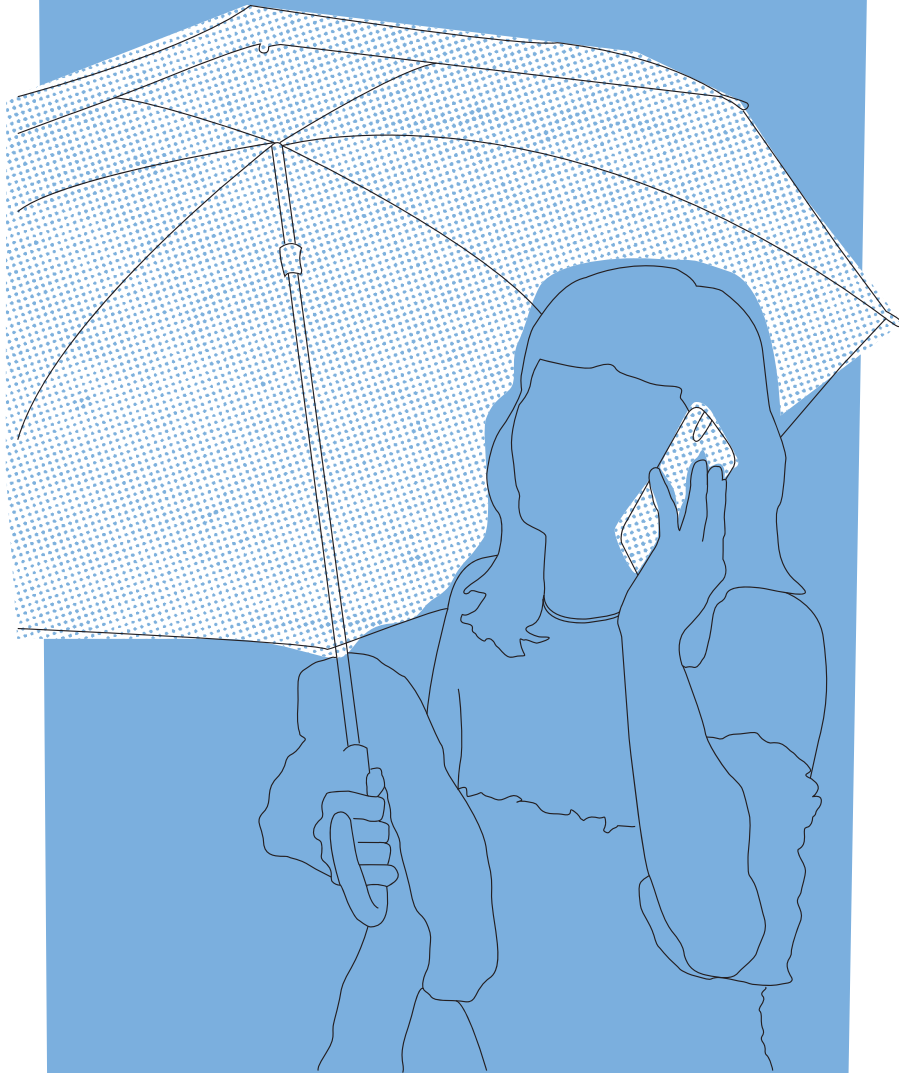
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Introduction & Overview



OUR STORY

Since 2018, Robbie's Hope has been tirelessly working to fulfill our mission of cutting the teen suicide rate in half by 2028. Organized by teens for teens in honor of Robbie Eckert, who died by suicide in October 2018, we are a movement of young people working to normalize talking about our emotions and to remind anyone who's struggling that they're not alone — and that It's Ok To Not Be Ok.

This guide is the second in our series of handbooks aimed at providing valuable resources to parents, trusted adults and teens for coping with feelings of anxiety and depression. This guide is meant to create lines of communication and open up the kind of dialogue that can sometimes be difficult, but can truly save lives.

The information included in this handbook has been created through lengthy conversations with teens themselves. It is meant to be used as a guide for navigating the use of technology in our everyday lives, and for how to have meaningful conversations about how technology use can affect our mental health and well-being. These are not hard and fast rules, but rather tips, tools and recommendations on how best to approach this delicate subject with one another.

TEENS AND TECHNOLOGY

You don't have to be a mental health expert to know technology can both help and hinder a teen's mental health.

It's important to provide guidance to teens on proper technology use. But it is equally important that parents and trusted adults model proper use of that same technology as well.

To clarify the use of the general term "technology" throughout this handbook, we're referring to all technology, including but not limited to:

- Cell phones
- Tablets
- Computers
- Gaming devices

HAVING IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT TECHNOLOGY

Arguably, the most important aspect of proper technology use is engaging in the right kinds of conversations about it.

Parents and trusted adults need to be able to have these conversations with their teens, about the good and bad that can come from technology use. **Keep in mind, these discussions are a two-way street, not a lecture.** The best approach for parents and trusted adults is to approach it from a framework of “Let’s learn together.”

High-level guidelines for framing the conversation:

1. Be sure to start having these conversations as early as possible, so that expectations and open lines of communication are established before they become problems.
 2. Conversations between a parent/trusted adult and teen about technology should be ongoing and should occur at a minimum of once per month.
 3. When establishing mutually agreed-upon rules between teens and parents on when it is appropriate and not appropriate to use technology:
 - Be aware that social media can have negative effects on mental health.
 - Provide examples of when technology was used in an appropriate and beneficial way within the last 30 days.*
 - Provide examples of when technology was used in a detrimental or negative way over the last 30 days.*
- *Be specific about these times. It may be helpful to keep a journal of these conversations to track what works well and what does not. Both the parent and teen should abide by these boundaries.*
- For teens, don’t be afraid to identify times when you’ve felt you were competing with technology for your parents’/trusted adults’ attention. Have a conversation with your parent/trusted adult about this and how to prevent it in the future.

- Notice how your technology use changes when you’re stressed. Does it increase? If so, identify ways to manage stress without technology. Be open to conversations about any change in your behavior, addressing why technology use has increased or decreased. See the Robbie’s Hope website at robbies-hope.com/resources for resources on how to manage stress without technology.
- Be open to receiving feedback at any time. It is important to create an openness to giving and receiving feedback regarding technology use. This is important not only to reinforce proper use, but to maintain an open dialogue about other mental stressors, such as cyberbullying or problems at school.

TIP FOR PARENTS:

Be open to allowing your teen to “call you out” and discuss concerns about your personal technology habits.

TIPS FOR TEENS:

Be open to allowing your parent to give you feedback about your technology use, and have the courage to tell your parents when technology usage becomes an issue.

– MOST IMPORTANTLY –
LISTEN TO AND RESPECT THE FEEDBACK
FROM EACH OTHER!

Parents should model
what they preach



USEFUL TIPS FOR SETTING TECHNOLOGY BOUNDARIES

A note from teens: Whenever possible, allow your teens to be the ones dictating how they want to limit themselves. Most teens don't actually enjoy spending hours on their phones. They want to spend more time offline and are willing to work with parents to set appropriate time limits for themselves. They just need your guidance in creating realistic guidelines to follow. Here are some ways to frame these conversations:

1. Work together to set reasonable time limits for social media and gaming. It is easy to get "lost" in social media or gaming, spending hours in front of your screen. Time limits will vary, but it is important that these are set and agreed upon.
2. Ask your teen to monitor his or her screen time and then assess whether that time is exceeding the limitations you mutually agreed upon. Monitor both weekly and daily use. Be sure to talk with your teen about why the screen time was excessive or not. (See the Robbie's Hope website at robbies-hope.com/resources for more resources that can help manage screen time.)
3. Establish "phone free" zones within the home and places you commonly visit, like a relative's house or restaurants.
4. Build a culture of trust rather than an invasion of privacy. Have conversations about what trust looks like when using technology. Questions to use for this conversation could be:
 - How can I show you I trust you with your cell phone?
 - How should I communicate my lack of trust with your cell phone use?
5. Parents need to exercise self-control vs. "telling" and making rules regarding screen time. Approach the conversation as a teacher or coach, not just "telling" your teen how to use technology.
Parents should model what they preach.
6. Discuss internet safety frequently. Online predators are real and lurking where you least expect. So it's important to address the reality of this threat through candid conversations with your teens about the risks and how to recognize, avoid and handle this kind of situation, should it happen to them. Many great resources can be found on the internet. See the Robbie's Hope website at robbies-hope.com/resources for resources as well.

GENERAL GUIDELINES ON HOW TO USE TECHNOLOGY

The following tips have been created by teens to help advise parents and trusted adults on how best to set reasonable and helpful guidelines:

- Be an example of how best to use and respect technology. You are teaching your teens what to do and what not to do with technology.
- **Be aware of hypocrisy and don't use technology in ways you tell your teen not to.** If you would not want your teen on his or her phone at certain times, make sure you aren't on yours either.
- Most teens perceive that their parents use technology too much.
- Try not to rely on texts or Snapchat to have a conversation together. Rely more on talking over the phone or in person.
- Don't be too pushy about "tracking apps." Use them only as a safety precaution. Too much reliance on these apps will show your teen there is a lack of trust.
- Don't take technology away or limit screen time without having a conversation first. The best approach with technology behavior management is "Let's learn together."
- Know who your teen's online friends are. Are they good influences or bad influences?
- Don't assume your teen's problems stem from social media or gaming.
- You can quickly destroy trust by looking through your teen's phone or tracking his or her phone without having a conversation first.
- If you sense your teen is struggling, here are some important points to talk with them about — and remember, it's always better to teach than to tell. (For additional tips and information on how and when to have these kinds of conversations, download and consult the Robbie's Hope Adult Handbook at robbies-hope.com/resources.)
- * Remind them that they are teens and that dealing with difficult emotions like anxiety and depression isn't just common, **it's normal**, and that technology use can exacerbate these feelings, so it's important to keep the lines of communication open and to work through the problem.

- * Let them know that while bad situations can happen, it is always best to have a conversation about what they're going through so they can **learn from the experiences they have had** and learn to manage these types of situations better in the future.
- * **Help them recognize that it's not as bad as they may think**, and that they will be able to get through this by finding the right outlets for support like their parents, mentors, trusted adults and friends.

APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE TIMES TO USE TECHNOLOGY

Appropriate times:

- During work or school hours. But be cognizant of bringing work/school home. Be able to disconnect at home.
- When both parent and teens are relaxing.
- When in a car, using hands-free technology.
- To document memories.
- For an emergency that requires quick information.

Inappropriate times:

- When around other people. Be present when around others.
- To resolve conflict. Use a direct conversation to resolve conflict.
- When you get home from school or work. Take the time to have a conversation with each other before using technology.
- When driving or when your teen is driving with only a permit.
- While eating. **A good rule to implement is "stack the phones," in which everyone puts a phone in the middle of the table when eating together.**
- Right before bedtime. This is a great time to have conversations.
- During any downtime. Use the downtime to have conversations.
- Do not text when you know the other person is driving. This is a safety issue and can distract the driver.
- Monitor the time spent getting world news and balance it with "news within your household."

When using social media,
focus on posting the true self,
not what would generate the most likes

BENEFITS AND DANGERS OF TEEN TECHNOLOGY USE

Benefits:

There certainly are benefits of using technology for teens, such as:

- *Staying in touch when not physically together.* Video messaging and video calls done through Zoom, FaceTime or group chats can connect teens to other teens and parents/trusted adults when physically not together.
- *Promoting creativity.* Technology can be used to efficiently promote creativity, which can help minimize anxiety, depression and other distressed emotions for teens.
- *Improving learning.* Technology can provide school and classroom materials that can enhance learning. It can also help teens stay organized and take notes.
- *Creating and listening to music,* which can be relaxing and improve a teen's mental state.

Dangers:

Technology can also negatively impact mental health. Remember, these dangers have been identified by teens for teens. Some of the most important ones include:

- *Posting to social media.* Following the number of likes on a post can be harmful. **When using social media, focus on posting the true self, not what would generate the most likes.** Post both the perfect and the not so perfect. Practice self-control when posting on social media. Do not overrepresent yourself, and don't hide imperfect parts of yourself.
- *Following others on social media.* **When viewing posts of others on social media, make sure to remember that it is not the whole story.** For example, teen girls can be influenced by older girls who post in swimsuits or other revealing clothes. Don't compare yourself to these pictures. They are only pictures and do not represent reality.

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- *Cyberbullying does exist.* It's important to educate yourself about the dangers of cyberbullying and how it can impact your mental health. Also, if you see any type of cyberbullying occurring to someone else, do something about it. **Don't be a bystander!** Ignoring bullying on social media or texts is the same as watching it happen in person and doing nothing about it. (It can be helpful to watch the movie *Cyberbully*.)
- *Beware of sexting.* While it's more prevalent in middle school than high school, it can exist across both. It is harmful for a variety of obvious reasons, including ruining self-confidence and reputations (sadly, mostly for girls), and it can put teens into situations that they simply aren't prepared for. Therefore, it's important for parents to start dialogues with their teens early to acknowledge the potential that they will be, or already have been, subject to this difficult issue so they can help them understand how best to handle and avoid it in the future.

SIGNS OF TECHNOLOGY ABUSE

Below are some general red flags for parents to watch out for so they can identify if their teen is engaging in the unhealthy use of technology. Remember, you're not looking for a single instance of technology abuse but rather a pattern of repeated incidents that indicate a problem.

- Excessive dependence on the phone. Measure weekly versus daily use. If there are signs of significant use or activity along with any signs of anxiety, depression or suicide, an important conversation needs to occur. Use apps or functions to self-monitor total screen time. (Check the Resources section at the end of the handbook for suggested apps.)
- Increase in dependence for online reaffirmation from social media apps, which could create an unhealthy usage of technology. A teen could possibly shy away from real-life interactions and instead look for more instant gratification online.
- Using technology during group gatherings rather than living in the moment and being present with others.

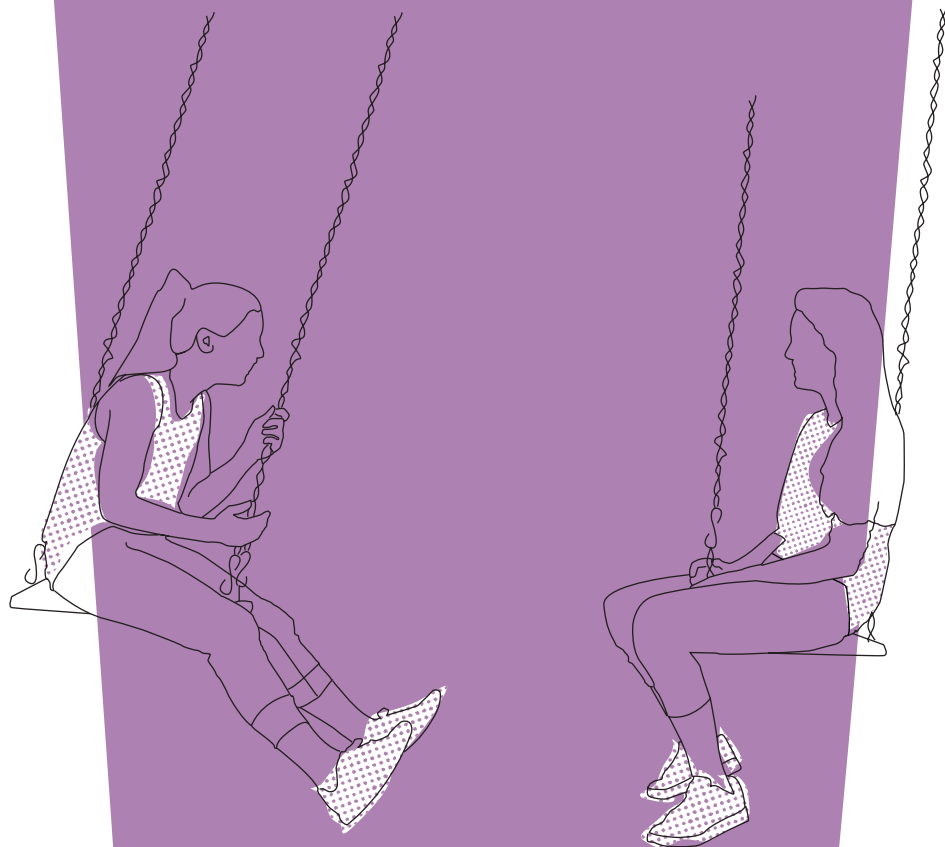
- You find or notice your teen engaging in online pornography. While this can be an uncomfortable topic to talk about, it is nonetheless relevant. Pornography is a persistent and readily available temptation, especially for males. The following tips are helpful recommendations for how best to address this issue with your teen and talking points to cover:
 1. Porn is an objectification of the same or opposite sex in an unhealthy way.
 2. It can lead to other behaviors that are demeaning and damaging to another person's mental health.
 3. Sexual health is an important topic and should be a regular conversation between adults and teens.

A teen does some of these things:

- *Says "I wish I had more followers"*
- *Constantly checks likes*
- *Has negative self-talk about his or her image*
- *Has a highly emotionally charged reaction if the phone is taken away*
- *Resists setting personal limits on screen time (daily or weekly)*

NOTES

*Recognize that social media should
be fun and take stress out of your life,
not build pressures up*



ADVICE FROM TEENS TO OTHER TEENS ABOUT TECHNOLOGY USE

These tips were created by teens for other teens struggling with anxiety and depression on how to approach their individual technology use:

1. Limit your time on social media. It generally makes anxiety or depression worse. While social media is a nice source of connection, it is not the “end all, be all” of your social life or enjoyment. The best parts of life and high school are not on a screen.
2. Recognize that social media and gaming should be fun and take stress out of your life, not build pressures up. Once it becomes too much to handle, you should step away and question what it is doing for you.
3. It's important to remember that you can use technology to connect and talk with others from a distance. You can always use your phone to lean on and reach out to friends/trusted individuals if you are having a hard time with your mental health because of the lack of social interaction.
4. Look for other forms of social media instead of IG/Twitter/TikTok/Snapchat/etc. Use calming apps such as meditation apps. Find social media outlets that allow you to feel a sense of calm or explore new places. See the Robbie's Hope website at robbies-hope.com/resources for resources on meditation apps and other calming apps.
5. Limit screen time on the apps that are a problem. This can be done on the iPhone or through special apps. This should be the teen's choice, not a parental punishment.
6. Limit your gaming time. Gaming should not take away from in person time with your family and friends. It is all about finding balance.

RESOURCES

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

800-273-8255

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio

888-628-9454

Veterans Crisis Line

800-273-8255

Colorado Crisis Services

844-493-8255 or text "Talk" to 38255

Trevor Project

866-488-7386 or text "Start" to 678678

For more resources, go to Robbies-Hope.com





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