

Unlocking a world of books

HOW TO PROMOTE POSITIVE READING HABITS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

By **Merete Kropp**
For *The Washington Post*

"I went on a really fun field trip today," our son informed the family over dinner after a science trip to a local river. "We got to row, but not in actual racing shells."

"Racing shells?" my husband inquired.

"Well, they were really just row-boats, but rowing with my friends reminded me of the book 'The Boys

in the Boat' that we were listening to in the car."

Daniel James Brown's recent best-seller may not have yet made it onto the radar of most seventh-grade boys; it is certainly not a book my son would have chosen for himself. His introduction to the book and subsequent interest in rowing terminology were ignited during a family road trip. As we drove, my husband and I listened to an audio version

of the story about nine young men from the University of Washington who competed in rowing in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. A few weeks after we got home, my son was making connections between what he had heard and events on his field trip.

Research consistently shows that extensive reading increases vocabulary and broadens knowledge and understanding of various topics. Most middle and high school stu-

dents who would greatly benefit from reading more do not have the luxury of time to enjoy reading for pleasure.

As children grow older and the schedules increasingly fill with activities associated with school sports and social endeavors, finding the time and opportunity to read can become a challenge. Like many parents, I occasionally mourn

See Reading, C.

Reading

Continued from C1

the time when bedtime routines included reading books aloud while snuggling. I long for the days when the homework was to read for 30 minutes and keep a reading log.

As a parent and an educator, I want to instill a love of reading in children. I intentionally model positive reading habits and provide time and opportunities for my older children to read. However, I do not want to make reading yet another requirement. Here is how I encourage my older children to read for enjoyment.

Read physical books. I spend a significant amount of time reading a variety of material daily. However, this may not be clear to my children because much of the reading I do is on electronic devices. For all they know, I might be spending time as they do: playing games, watching videos or engaging in social media. Children need to see the people they look up to clearly engaged in positive reading habits. That makes it critical for adults to read

tangible books.

Subscribe to print newspapers and magazines. Although much news-related reading in our family is done online, a printed version of the newspaper is delivered every Sunday. The newspaper provides access to current events, news and editorial content our teenagers may not otherwise encounter. I leave newspapers and magazines on the kitchen table throughout the week. I occasionally catch my kids leafing through them, reading bits and pieces as they eat breakfast, enjoy an afternoon snack or fill a few idle minutes while waiting for their next scheduled activity.

Schedule routine family meals. When our family takes the time to enjoy a meal together, we share not only the food but also the events of the day, including conversations about the books we are reading. These gatherings facilitate discussions on topics related to current events, ideas and opinions.

Listen to audiobooks. On our recent road trip, we spent 30 hours in our minivan. I had looked forward to the opportunity to listen to a good book with

my husband, but never thought about requiring the kids to listen with us. I realized, upon stopping for a meal, that our children also were listening. They asked good questions and made insightful comments on the characters and the plot. At some point, they had stopped listening to their music and tuned in to the book.

Give books as gifts. Children learn to value the things adults value when they are presented as special treats. Books can be given as gifts for birthdays and other occasions. A boxed set of books, a subscription to a favorite magazine or a book by a beloved author could encourage older children to read for enjoyment.

Read (some) books your kids are reading. Books are more enjoyable when we share conversations about them. Books for young adults are interesting and engaging, and we can learn about our children's worlds and values by reading what they read.

Create media-free zones. Establish family norms designating device-free times and places to encourage conversation, reading and other quiet activities.



Jasu Hu

Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?

More comfortable online than out partying, post-Millennials are safer, physically, than adolescents have ever been. But they're on the brink of a mental-health crisis.

JEAN M. TWENGE

AUG 3, 2017 | TECHNOLOGY

Like *The Atlantic*? Subscribe to The Atlantic Daily, our free weekday email newsletter.

SIGN UP



ONE DAY last summer, around noon, I called Athena, a 13-year-old who lives in Houston, Texas. She answered her phone—she's had an iPhone since she was 11—sounding as if she'd just woken up. We

disappear. In all my analyses of generational data—some reaching back to the 1930s—I had never seen anything like it.

The allure of independence, so powerful to previous generations, holds less sway over today's teens.

At first I presumed these might be blips, but the trends persisted, across several years and a series of national surveys. The changes weren't just in degree, but in kind. The biggest difference between the Millennials and their predecessors was in how they viewed the world; teens today differ from the Millennials not just in their views but in how they spend their time. The experiences they have every day are radically different from those of the generation that came of age just a few years before them.

What happened in 2012 to cause such dramatic shifts in behavior? It was after the Great Recession, which officially lasted from 2007 to 2009 and had a starker effect on Millennials trying to find a place in a sputtering economy. But it was exactly the moment when the proportion of Americans who owned a smartphone surpassed 50 percent.

THE MORE I pored over yearly surveys of teen attitudes and behaviors, and the more I talked with young people like Athena, the clearer it became that theirs is a generation shaped by the smartphone and by the concomitant rise of social media. I call them iGen. Born between 1995 and 2012, members of this generation are growing up with smartphones, have an Instagram account before they start high school, and do not remember a time before the internet. The Millennials grew up with the web as well, but it wasn't ever-present in their lives, at hand at all times, day and night. iGen's oldest members were early adolescents when the iPhone was introduced, in 2007, and high-school students when the iPad entered the scene, in 2010. A 2017 survey of more than 5,000 American teens found that three out of four owned an iPhone.

IN THE EARLY 1970s, the photographer Bill Yates shot a series of portraits at the Sweetheart Roller Skating Rink in Tampa, Florida. In one, a shirtless teen stands with a large bottle of peppermint schnapps stuck in the waistband of his jeans. In another, a boy who looks no older than 12 poses with a cigarette in his mouth. The rink was a place where kids could get away from their parents and inhabit a world of their own, a world where they could drink, smoke, and make out in the backs of their cars. In stark black-and-white, the adolescent Boomers gaze at Yates's camera with the self-confidence born of making your own choices—even if, perhaps especially if, your parents wouldn't think they were the right ones.

Fifteen years later, during my own teenage years as a member of Generation X, smoking had lost some of its romance, but independence was definitely still in. My friends and I plotted to get our driver's license as soon as we could, making DMV appointments for the day we turned 16 and using our newfound freedom to escape the confines of our suburban neighborhood. Asked by our parents, "When will you be home?" we replied, "When do I have to be?"

But the allure of independence, so powerful to previous generations, holds less sway over today's teens, who are less likely to leave the house without their parents. The shift is stunning: 12th-graders in 2015 were going out less often than *eighth-graders* did as recently as 2009.

Today's teens are also less likely to date. The initial stage of courtship, which Gen Xers called "liking" (as in "Ooh, he likes you!"), kids now call "talking"—an ironic choice for a generation that prefers texting to actual conversation. After two teens have "talked" for a while, they might start dating. But only about 56 percent of high-school seniors in 2015 went out on dates; for Boomers and Gen Xers, the number was about 85 percent.

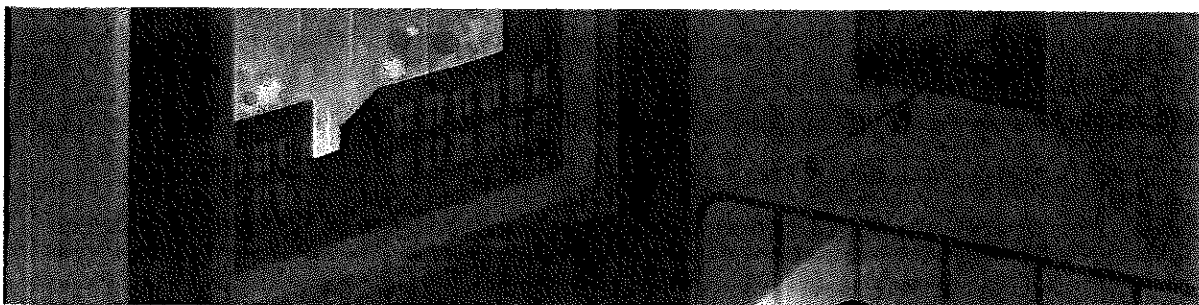
The decline in dating tracks with a decline in sexual activity. The drop is the sharpest for ninth-graders, among whom the number of sexually active teens has been cut by almost 40 percent since 1991. The average teen now has had sex for the first time by the spring of 11th grade, a full year later than the average Gen

Gen X managed to stretch adolescence beyond all previous limits: Its members started becoming adults earlier and finished becoming adults later. Beginning with Millennials and continuing with iGen, adolescence is contracting again—but only because its onset is being delayed. Across a range of behaviors—drinking, dating, spending time unsupervised—18-year-olds now act more like 15-year-olds used to, and 15-year-olds more like 13-year-olds. Childhood now stretches well into high school.

Why are today's teens waiting longer to take on both the responsibilities and the pleasures of adulthood? Shifts in the economy, and parenting, certainly play a role. In an information economy that rewards higher education more than early work history, parents may be inclined to encourage their kids to stay home and study rather than to get a part-time job. Teens, in turn, seem to be content with this homebody arrangement—not because they're so studious, but because their social life is lived on their phone. They don't need to leave home to spend time with their friends.

If today's teens were a generation of grinds, we'd see that in the data. But eighth-, 10th-, and 12th-graders in the 2010s actually spend less time on homework than Gen X teens did in the early 1990s. (High-school seniors headed for four-year colleges spend about the same amount of time on homework as their predecessors did.) The time that seniors spend on activities such as student clubs and sports and exercise has changed little in recent years. Combined with the decline in working for pay, this means iGen teens have more leisure time than Gen X teens did, not less.

So what are they doing with all that time? They are on their phone, in their room, alone and often distressed.



be nationally representative, has asked 12th-graders more than 1,000 questions every year since 1975 and queried eighth- and 10th-graders since 1991. The survey asks teens how happy they are and also how much of their leisure time they spend on various activities, including nonscreen activities such as in-person social interaction and exercise, and, in recent years, screen activities such as using social media, texting, and browsing the web. The results could not be clearer: Teens who spend more time than average on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more time than average on nonscreen activities are more likely to be happy.

There's not a single exception. All screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all nonscreen activities are linked to more happiness. Eighth-graders who spend 10 or more hours a week on social media are 56 percent more likely to say they're unhappy than those who devote less time to social media. Admittedly, 10 hours a week is a lot. But those who spend six to nine hours a week on social media are still 47 percent more likely to say they are unhappy than those who use social media even less. The opposite is true of in-person interactions. Those who spend an above-average amount of time with their friends in person are 20 percent less likely to say they're unhappy than those who hang out for a below-average amount of time.

The more time teens spend looking at screens, the more likely they are to report symptoms of depression.

If you were going to give advice for a happy adolescence based on this survey, it would be straightforward: Put down the phone, turn off the laptop, and do something—anything—that does not involve a screen. Of course, these analyses don't unequivocally prove that screen time *causes* unhappiness; it's possible that unhappy teens spend more time online. But recent research suggests that screen time, in particular social-media use, does indeed cause unhappiness. One study asked college students with a Facebook page to complete short surveys on their phone over the course of two weeks. They'd get a text message with a link five

first time in 24 years, the teen suicide rate was higher than the teen homicide rate.

Depression and suicide have many causes; too much technology is clearly not the only one. And the teen suicide rate was even higher in the 1990s, long before smartphones existed. Then again, about four times as many Americans now take antidepressants, which are often effective in treating severe depression, the type most strongly linked to suicide.

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION between smartphones and the apparent psychological distress this generation is experiencing? For all their power to link kids day and night, social media also exacerbate the age-old teen concern about being left out. Today's teens may go to fewer parties and spend less time together in person, but when they do congregate, they document their hangouts relentlessly—on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook. Those not invited to come along are keenly aware of it. Accordingly, the number of teens who feel left out has reached all-time highs across age groups. Like the increase in loneliness, the upswing in feeling left out has been swift and significant.

This trend has been especially steep among girls. Forty-eight percent more girls said they often felt left out in 2015 than in 2010, compared with 27 percent more boys. Girls use social media more often, giving them additional opportunities to feel excluded and lonely when they see their friends or classmates getting together without them. Social media levy a psychic tax on the teen doing the posting as well, as she anxiously awaits the affirmation of comments and likes. When Athena posts pictures to Instagram, she told me, "I'm nervous about what people think and are going to say. It sometimes bugs me when I don't get a certain amount of likes on a picture."

Girls have also borne the brunt of the rise in depressive symptoms among today's teens. Boys' depressive symptoms increased by 21 percent from 2012 to 2015, while girls' increased by 50 percent—more than twice as much. The rise in suicide, too, is more pronounced among girls. Although the rate increased for

Curious, I asked my undergraduate students at San Diego State University what they do with their phone while they sleep. Their answers were a profile in obsession. Nearly all slept with their phone, putting it under their pillow, on the mattress, or at the very least within arm's reach of the bed. They checked social media right before they went to sleep, and reached for their phone as soon as they woke up in the morning (they had to—all of them used it as their alarm clock). Their phone was the last thing they saw before they went to sleep and the first thing they saw when they woke up. If they woke in the middle of the night, they often ended up looking at their phone. Some used the language of addiction. "I know I shouldn't, but I just can't help it," one said about looking at her phone while in bed. Others saw their phone as an extension of their body—or even like a lover: "Having my phone closer to me while I'm sleeping is a comfort."

It may be a comfort, but the smartphone is cutting into teens' sleep: Many now sleep less than seven hours most nights. Sleep experts say that teens should get about nine hours of sleep a night; a teen who is getting less than seven hours a night is significantly sleep deprived. Fifty-seven percent more teens were sleep deprived in 2015 than in 1991. In just the four years from 2012 to 2015, 22 percent more teens failed to get seven hours of sleep.

The increase is suspiciously timed, once again starting around when most teens got a smartphone. Two national surveys show that teens who spend three or more hours a day on electronic devices are 28 percent more likely to get less than seven hours of sleep than those who spend fewer than three hours, and teens who visit social-media sites every day are 19 percent more likely to be sleep deprived. A meta-analysis of studies on electronic-device use among children found similar results: Children who use a media device right before bed are more likely to sleep less than they should, more likely to sleep poorly, and more than twice as likely to be sleepy during the day.

I've observed my toddler, barely old enough to walk, confidently swiping her way through an iPad.

ingrained new media are in their young lives. I've observed my toddler, barely old enough to walk, confidently swiping her way through an iPad. I've experienced my 6-year-old asking for her own cellphone. I've overheard my 9-year-old discussing the latest app to sweep the fourth grade. Prying the phone out of our kids' hands will be difficult, even more so than the quixotic efforts of my parents' generation to get their kids to turn off MTV and get some fresh air. But more seems to be at stake in urging teens to use their phone responsibly, and there are benefits to be gained even if all we instill in our children is the importance of moderation. Significant effects on both mental health and sleep time appear after two or more hours a day on electronic devices. The average teen spends about two and a half hours a day on electronic devices. Some mild boundary-setting could keep kids from falling into harmful habits.

In my conversations with teens, I saw hopeful signs that kids themselves are beginning to link some of their troubles to their ever-present phone. Athena told me that when she does spend time with her friends in person, they are often looking at their device instead of at her. "I'm trying to talk to them about something, and they don't actually look at my face," she said. "They're looking at their phone, or they're looking at their Apple Watch." "What does that feel like, when you're trying to talk to somebody face-to-face and they're not looking at you?" I asked. "It kind of hurts," she said. "It hurts. I know my parents' generation didn't do that. I could be talking about something super important to me, and they wouldn't even be listening."

Once, she told me, she was hanging out with a friend who was texting her boyfriend. "I was trying to talk to her about my family, and what was going on, and she was like, 'Uh-huh, yeah, whatever.'" So I took her phone out of her hands and I threw it at my wall."

I couldn't help laughing. "You play volleyball," I said. "Do you have a pretty good arm?" "Yep," she replied.

This article has been adapted from Jean M. Twenge's forthcoming book, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—and What That Means for the Rest of Us*.

Kids can learn how to deal with stress

By Katie Hurley For The Washington Post

A young girl sits in my office, describing the “swishy” feeling that she gets in her stomach when she’s at school. It tends to happen at drop-off, just after lunch and as she watches the clock tick toward the end of the day. It happens so often that she knows she’s not actually sick, but it bothers her just the same. She can’t find a way to make it go away, and that makes it hard to concentrate.

The thing is, she actually is sick to her stomach. This 7-year-old is, quite literally, worried sick. Stress and anxiety trigger that “swishy” feeling in her stomach, and without adequate strategies to work through it, that feeling is there to stay.

By the time young worriers get to me, they’ve been silently fighting these feelings for quite some time. Although kids are under increased stress these days, most don’t really know what it means to feel stress. What they do know is that they have headaches, stomachaches, nightmares and an intense feeling of wanting to stay close to home.

According to the results of the Stress in America Survey released by the American Psychological Association, teens report higher levels of stress than adults during the school year. Findings from the survey show that 31 percent of teens report feeling overwhelmed by stress, 30 percent say stress makes them sad or depressed, and 36

percent have experienced fatigue because of stress. Yet nearly half of teens surveyed (42 percent) responded that they aren’t doing enough, or aren’t sure if they’re doing enough, to manage their stress.

If teens, who are fairly aware of the stress impacting their lives, struggle to find ways to manage, how can we expect younger children to cope?

When parents come to my office with their stressed-out little ones, we talk about goals first. What is it that they hope to gain from treatment? More often than not, parents want me to magically erase the stress from their child’s lives. They want it to go away. I sometimes wish I had a magic wand to serve just that purpose, but removing stress from the lives of our children isn’t a realistic goal.

Parents are always on a mission to protect their kids from the hard stuff, it seems. Bully-proof your kid. Stress-proof your kid. Intervene at school at the slightest sign of discomfort, which essentially boils down to school-proofing your child. Here’s the deal: Kids experience stress and discomfort and they will encounter difficult situations. It’s impossible to completely remove stress from the lives of our children. There isn’t a way to stress-proof our children. What we can do, though, is teach our kids to be stress-savvy.

When we take the time to educate our children about stress and teach them strategies to use when they feel anxious and overwhelmed, we not only normalize the complex emotions that sometimes confuse young children, but we teach them how to manage and cope with their stress.

Here’s how to do it:

complicated, but the best gift you can give your child is unconditional love. Kids will encounter stress and hard days; that's part of life. Knowing that you will listen and help them empowers them to work through their stress instead of stuffing it down and potentially making it worse.

•
Katie Hurley is a child and adolescent psychotherapist and parenting educator in Los

Angeles, and the author of

"The Happy Kid Handbook: How to Raise Joyful Children in a Stressful World."

42%

Teens in survey who say they aren't doing enough, or aren't sure if they're doing enough, to manage stress