We are having an amazing year at Fruitvale ISD! Thank you to the students, staff, parents and community for their continued support. I wanted to share an article with parents that I think is so important in the technology age we live in today. I took some highlights to share with you to help you navigate social media and technology. We are seeing a rise in mental health issue with our students over the past several years, and there is a lot of research out there that attributes it to the rise in social media and access to information accessed with technology. I want to encourage all parents to consider this information when deciding on the level of social media/technology access you give to your children.

**How Using Social Media Affects Teenager** by Rachel Ehmke

Experts worry that the social media and text messages that have become so integral to teenage life are promoting anxiety and lowering self-esteem. Some survey results have found that Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram all led to increased feelings of depression, anxiety, poor body image and loneliness.

Teens are masters at keeping themselves occupied in the hours after school until way past bedtime. When they're not doing their homework (and when they are) they're online and on their phones, texting, sharing, trolling, scrolling, you name it. Of course before everyone had an Instagram account teens kept themselves busy, too, but they were more likely to do their chatting on the phone, or in person when hanging out at the mall. It may have looked like a lot of aimless hanging around, but what they were doing was experimenting, trying out skills, and succeeding and failing in tons of tiny real-time interactions that kids today are missing out on. For one thing, modern teens are learning to do most of their communication while looking at a screen, not another person. There's no question kids are missing out on very critical social skills.

When friendship is conducted online and through texts, kids are doing this in a context stripped of many of the most personal—and sometimes intimidating—aspects of communication. It's easier to keep your guard up when you're texting, so less is at stake. You aren't hearing or seeing the effect that your words are having on the other person. Because the conversation isn't happening in real time, each party can take more time to consider a response. No wonder kids say calling someone on the phone is "too intense"— it requires more direct communication, and if you aren't used to that it may well feel scary.

The other big danger that comes from kids communicating more indirectly is that it has gotten easier to be cruel. "Kids text all sorts of things that you would never in a million years contemplate saying to anyone's face," says Dr. Donna Wick, a clinical and developmental psychologist.

Peer acceptance is a big thing for adolescents, and many of them care about their image as much as a politician running for office, and to them it can feel as serious. Add to that the fact that kids today are getting actual polling data on how much people like them or their appearance via things like "likes." It's enough to turn anyone's head. Who wouldn't want to make herself look cooler if she can? So kids can spend hours pruning their

online identities, trying to project an idealized image. Teenage girls sort through hundreds of photos, agonizing over which ones to post online. Boys compete for attention by trying to out-gross one other, pushing the envelope as much as they can in the already disinhibited atmosphere online. Kids gang up on each other.

Adolescents have always been doing this, but with the advent of social media they are faced with more opportunities—and more traps—than ever before. When kids scroll through their feeds and see how great everyone seems, it only adds to the pressure. We're used to worrying about the impractical ideals that photo shopped magazine models give to our kids, but what happens with the kid next door is photo shopped, too?

Another big change that has come with new technology and especially smart phones is that we are never really alone. Kids update their status, share what they're watching, listening to, and reading, and have apps that let their friends know their specific location on a map at all times. Even if a person isn't trying to keep his friends updated, he's still never out of reach of a text message. The result is that kids feel hyper connected with each other. The conversation never needs to stop, and it feels like there's always something new happening.

"Whatever we think of the 'relationships' maintained and in some cases initiated on social media, kids never get a break from them," notes Dr. Wick. "And that, in and of itself, can produce anxiety. Everyone needs a respite from the demands of intimacy and connection; time alone to regroup, replenish and just chill out. When you don't have that, it's easy to become emotionally depleted, fertile ground for anxiety to breed."

It's also surprisingly easy to feel lonely in the middle of all that hyper connection. For one thing, kids now know with depressing certainty when they're being ignored. We all have phones and we all respond to things pretty quickly, so when you're waiting for a response that doesn't come, the silence can be deafening. The silent treatment might be a strategic insult or just the unfortunate side effect of an online adolescent relationship that starts out intensely but then fades away.

Both experts interviewed for this article agreed that the best thing parents can do to minimize the risks associated with technology is to curtail their own consumption first. It's up to parents to set a good example of what healthy computer usage looks like. Most of us check our phones or our email too much, out of either real interest or nervous habit. Kids should be used to seeing our faces, not our heads bent over a screen. Establish technology-free zones in the house and technology-free hours when no one uses the phone, including mom and dad. "Don't walk in the door after work in the middle of a conversation," Dr. Steiner-Adair advises. "Don't walk in the door after work, say 'hi' quickly, and then 'just check your email.' In the morning, get up a half hour earlier than your kids and check your email then. Give them your full attention until they're out the door. And neither of you should be using phones in the car to or from school because that's an important time to talk."

Not only does limiting the amount of time you spend plugged in to computers provide a healthy counterpoint to the tech-obsessed world, it also strengthens the parent-child

bond and makes kids feel more secure. Kids need to know that you are available to help them with their problems, talk about their day, or give them a reality check.

"It is the mini-moments of disconnection, when parents are too focused on their own devices and screens, that dilute the parent-child relationship," Dr. Steiner-Adair warns. And when kids start turning to the Internet for help or to process whatever happened during the day, you might not like what happens. "Tech can give your children more information that you can, and it doesn't have your values," notes Dr. Steiner-Adair. "It won't be sensitive to your child's personality, and it won't answer his question in a developmentally appropriate way."

In addition Dr. Wick advises delaying the age of first use as much as possible. If your child is on Facebook, Dr. Wick says that you should be your child's friend and monitor her page. Offline, the gold standard advice for helping kids build healthy self-esteem is to get them involved in something that they're interested in. It could be sports or music or taking apart computers or volunteering—anything that sparks an interest and gives them confidence. When kids learn to feel good about what they can *do* instead of how they look and what they own, they're happier and better prepared for success in real life. That most of these activities also involve spending time interacting with peers face-to-face is just the icing on the cake.

Thank you for your support of FISD!!

Sincerely,

*Rebecca Bain*