visions

growing up in a digital world

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likes, comments and consumption

❋ footnotes reminder

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letter to the editor

In 2011, my daughter, Elizabeth, wrote the article in *Visions Journal* called "Don't call me Borderline." When she wrote this article, Elizabeth was in a good place, happy in her work of Community Mental Health Worker, sustained by the innovative programs she herself designed, offering help to those seeking BPD recovery. At the time, professional services to treat this diagnosis were almost nonexistent. Her local health authority had one treatment program and cited limited staff and space. In her time, psychologists refused to treat patients with BPD, diagnosing them as 'acting out' or 'faking it.' The irony is, unable to access the help she needed for her own recovery, Elizabeth took her life in 2013. The field lost a valiant, imaginative, enthusiastic, front line worker.

A follow up article might be useful for historical context. Things have changed since 2013. Today, BPD treatment programs are widely available.

There are things Elizabeth did for remedial mental health. She was light years in advance of professional thinking of the time for remedial mental health when she foresaw the 'gathering place' or 'clubhouse system' in mental health recovery and opened a small house in Victoria where youth with challenges could gather together in the evenings. She also founded a participant run BPD support group. Both of these offerings still run today in different forms.

— *Judith Bogod, Burnaby, BC*

editor's message

While I was growing up in the 80's and 90's, the internet was only just beginning to establish a common household presence in British Columbian households. That funny garbled sound on the phone line when we wanted to connect to the internet opened up a vast new world of possibilities and connections. Youth who grew up in my generation connected with others through ICQ, Friendster, Myspace, AOL chatrooms and this new technology called email. Those who grew up in earlier decades adjusted to life with other technologies—now termed 'traditional' or 'mainstream' media—such as television and radio. These days, children and youth are growing up with a new plethora of digital technologies at school, home and play. From TikTok, Snapchat and Youtube to Virtual Reality, artificial intelligence and smart appliances, technology is mediating more and more of daily life.

Although today's digital technology feels vastly different than the technology that came before it, many of the questions around growing up in a digital world are the same: How much is too much screen-time for children and youth? Are digital relationships just as fulfilling as in-person relationships? Is what they're being exposed to safe? How do we navigate mental health and substance use concerns while living life in digital spaces?

In this issue, our contributors explore precisely these questions, and more. Our Guest Editor, Dr. Midori Ogasawara, explores what it means to unplug in an era when most of our relationships—to ourselves, to each other, and with societal institutions—are lived out online. Carol Todd, mother of Amanda Todd, shares tips towards living a healthier and safer digital life. Malcolm,* parent of a gifted son who lives with autism and ADHD, shares how and when screens can be beneficial in unique ways. In the teaser section for our next issue on Intergenerational Trauma, Ferma Ravn-Greenway shares some ideas on how to parent in an age where disaster media and "doomscrolling" is the norm.

I also wanted to alert you to a new change to Visions: we will now be experimenting with three longer issues a year instead of four. Given huge increases in printing and production costs, we're moving to a more fiscally responsible model while still bringing you all of the same great mental health and substance use content in print and online. Please feel free to share your thoughts with me on this change by writing to visions@heretohelp.bc.ca. **V**

Kamal Arora, PhD
Kamal Arora is Visions *Editor and Leader of Health Promotion and Education at the Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division*

Generation Z Worries About the Digital Future
YOUTH AND "BIG TECH"

MIDORI OGASAWARA, PHD

Last winter, when I gave an assignment called the "Social Media Disconnect Challenge" in my undergraduate course, Media and Contemporary Society, at the University of Victoria, I was not sure if all students would complete it.[1] I assumed some of them would hate the idea and some might even drop the course.

Midori Ogasawara

Midori Ogasawara is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Victoria. Midori studies surveillance and technology from a human rights perspective. Before becoming a sociologist, Midori was an investigative journalist for Japan's national newspaper and was the first Japanese journalist to interview US National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden

The Social Media Disconnect Challenge is a two-week group project. First, you document your use of networked media on devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, smart phones) for one week, then you start a one-week media fast, avoiding all of the following:

- social media platforms
- nocturnal screen time
- gaming
- internet browsing (except for schoolwork)
- texting (except with parents/guardians, employers or in emergency situations)
- listening to music with headphones[2]

Afterwards, I asked students to collaboratively identify what they had noticed and how their life had changed during the fast, and to write a group report on mindful social media participation.

I worried because most of my students are part of so-called Generation Z (or Gen Z), which refers to the post-millennial generation of kids who were born mainly in the 2000s and grew up with the internet. They are expected to naturally have a better understanding of digital technologies than older generations and to live in a virtual world to communicate with peers and participate in social activities.

So I repeated that the Challenge lasted just one week, not the rest of their lives. Also, they didn't need my permission to use an electronic device when they needed one. But I promised that the more they disconnected, the more they would get back from the Challenge.

Surprising results of a media fast

When students submitted their group reports three weeks later, my worries were met with a surprising and opposite result: all of the students who participated in the group work completed the assignment, and many clearly stated positive effects from their social media fast. Some even enjoyed it.

One student, Tobi,* immediately noticed that he had better concentration when studying. He finished a school assignment in only 45 minutes; with the distraction of social media and music, this assignment usually took him three hours. Another student, Rachel, found time to prepare hot meals for herself—getting groceries, following a recipe—and enjoyed a tastier, healthier diet. Xiao visited her aunt, who lives outside of town, and gathered face to face more often than usual with her friends. She found this more satisfying than chatting online.

Other students began new personal projects: Natalia tried crochet for the first time and Rohit picked up a guitar to practise again. Ali turned the (real) page of a sci-fi novel just for fun (not for study)!

Of course, some students had difficulties completing the assignment: the beginning was harder for Colleen, and the last few days felt like hell for Akira. Overall though, the students enjoyed the new time and space created by the absence of social media in their life.

The Social Media Disconnect Challenge naturally led students to critical thinking: is it worth putting aside that much time for social media? What else could they be doing during that time? In fact, several students altered their digital behaviours ahead of the actual fast when they noticed how many hours they had been spending using their digital devices—on average, 8–10 hours per day. Similarly, the group reports revealed that some students had already been concerned about overcommitment to social media prior to the assignment and were worried about the negative impacts on their health, especially mental health.

Maybe that's why the most common findings among the groups were that they slept better and felt less anxiety during the Challenge. I was surprised by this because health was not my major focus; this is a sociology course on contemporary media, and I wanted to improve students' media literacy. In the classroom I discussed the organization of social media, asking students questions like: why do we spend hours on social media? And why is it so addictive?

New modes of surveillance

Some students had a ready answer to why they're on social media so much:

Photo credit: martin-dm at ©iStockphoto.com

> The Social Media Disconnect Challenge naturally led students to critical thinking: is it worth putting aside that much time for social media? What else could they be doing during that time?

because it's fun. Others said: because it's cheap. Social media users have a variety of reasons for going online, but social media companies have only one: they make more profits when users stay online longer. Digital platforms are designed to make users keep scrolling or swiping by showing eye-catching photos and videos and giving users instant gratification.

While you watch a YouTube video or upload a photo to Instagram, Meta (the company that owns Facebook and Instagram) and Google collect your personal data on your interests, behaviours or relationships, sell the data to advertisers and make money out of it. The Netflix documentary The Social Dilemma describes this new business model established by the "big tech" companies.[3] In the film, former tech workers share the internal view of their industry: internet users are not customers but products for advertisers.

Many scholars find that surveillance activities are the basis of this business model. To collect more data from you, big tech keeps creating new apps and tricks to anchor your attention. Often, this mechanism is referred to as surveillance capitalism.[4] In other words, it's not really your fault if you feel addicted to social media, because the addiction is systematically encouraged.

For youth, especially since the pandemic, educational spaces have also become sites of surveillance, including through Zoom, Google Workspace and proctoring software (for monitoring exams). For example, big tech can find out what is discussed in virtual classrooms, how many hours students take to complete assignments and which ways their eyes move during exams. Companies collect and analyze that data to find "pressure points" to sell more products and services. (The same kind of data analytics can be used to modify people's social and political behaviours.[5]) As a result, young people experience more sleepless nights and constant anxiety.

The Social Media Disconnect Challenge let me know that surveillance capitalism has a serious impact on young people's health and future. To protect children and vulnerable people, adults need to respond to the negative effects of digital technologies. Almost all the group reports coming out of my assignment stated that students would like to practise social media disconnection regularly, and they recommended it to their generation and beyond. Who would not like a better sleep and sweet dreams? V

* *All student names are pseudonyms.*

Binge Watching Away Loneliness
COMMUNITY IN A DIGITAL AGE

STUART R. POYNTZ, PHD

For many people, binge watching is how we watch television today. It's not exceptional, a sign of ill-health or cause for concern or panic. It's just how TV is consumed by most age groups most of the time.

Stuart is Director of the School of Communication at SFU, where he is also Professor. His research focuses on children's and youth's media culture. His new co-authored monograph, Youthsites,[1] examines the youth arts sector, which makes space worldwide for creative self-expression and hope for teenagers, educators and artists

Stuart R. Poyntz

In a 2017 US study nearly 73% of people surveyed had binge watched video content, and 90% of millennials and members of "Generation Z" (or Gen Z, born after the late 1990s) said they binge watch TV.[2] A 2021 poll in Canada found that 73% of people had binge watched content in the last year, and not just once in a while, but regularly and across all media.[3] Of the people in Canada who binged, another study showed that almost one quarter were binge watching at least once a week.[4]

These figures are from pre- and early-COVID times. As waves of the pandemic led to long periods of isolation from each other, binging became an antidote for our loneliness. For some, binging is a friend we visit with to find companionship and a story to keep us company. For others, it creates distraction and escape, allowing people to break out from daily life and sometimes manage the stress that's part of living in a time of health—and a myriad other—crises.

Binge watching then and now

I think all of us know binging when we see it or do it, but one useful definition describes binging as watching three or more episodes of a series in one sitting on any medium. This seems pretty innocent, but of course binging can also include many, many episodes, whole seasons and entire programs consumed over long, drawn-out viewing sessions.

However we describe the activity, binging isn't entirely new. Intense fan relationships with TV shows, video content and other media have been around for decades.[5] But something changed when we started holding our screens in our hands. With phones and tablets, everyone—but especially young people—started taking video content everywhere and binging it any time.

Add to that streaming services like Netflix, Disney+ and Hulu, and video sharing sites like YouTube, which give us access to more content 24 hours a day, and the result is the so-called "Netflix effect": marathon-like viewing sessions of content across a range of genres.[5] While Matrix reports that this pattern emerged in the early 2010s,[5] it was really the release of original TV content on Netflix in 2013 that brought binging into the mainstream. That's the year Arrested Development, House of Cards and Orange is the New Black became hugely popular with the 18–34 and younger viewing demographics, leading to binge watching sessions.

Those young viewers also shared social media posts about the shows' largely positive reviews. In the process, they figured out how to use binging to connect with others and create community through a cultural conversation about the latest and best shows. At the same time, their engaged viewing quickly became irresistible to streaming services and other media and technology companies. Companies have figured out that collecting and using data about media users' habits is essential to their bottom line. Audience attention is in fact a form of currency or money for them.

Big markets and big fears surround binging

The upshot of this is that companies that stream, like Disney, and platforms like YouTube now use the popularity of binge watching to target new programs and shows to children and youth audiences. In the mid-2010s, for instance, Disney made the first nine "appisodes" of Sheriff Callie's Wild West available for streaming on its mobile app to quickly reach young audiences.[5] This kind of marketing takes advantage of the popularity of binging, but it also hooks audiences to apps, brands and even "linear" (or traditional, mostly cable-based) television viewing experiences for years to come.

Binging has therefore led to a lot of concern. Some worry that marathon viewing threatens the well-being of Gen Z children and youth. Binging also suggests addictive behaviour—even if "addiction" is not a helpful diagnosis to describe the complex ways young people (and the rest of us) relate to media. Binge watching can even recall fears of screenagers[6] (teens immersed in all things screens) from earlier in the 2000s, not to mention earlier media panics (undue or excessive fear of media) about how new types of commercial media might harm young people.

Rethinking the binge

We've since learned that many of these media panics, including suggestions that excessive screen time is linked to childhood obesity, are exaggerated or simply misunderstand how young people negotiate with, and sometimes resist media messaging. Still, some recent research does suggest that binge watching can coincide with troubling

psychological outcomes for young people's mental health. One study showed that binge watching tends to precede negative experiences like stress, loneliness, insomnia, depression and anxiety.[7] But preceding negative experience doesn't mean binging causes them. In this sense, binge watching might not be a problem itself so much as a red flag, calling us to pay attention to the social and mental health challenges young people are facing today.

The bitter consequences of the pandemic have been felt by many, but they have been especially difficult for young people. Two-plus years is a long time, but two years is a lifetime when you're 15, 16 or 17 and your relationships, your body, your passions and your ideas are all changing. Between 2020 and 2022 in Canada (and other countries) these changes most often happened for teenagers on their own. In this context binge watching is neither surprising nor necessarily concerning.

Binging reinvents the collective water cooler we might have gathered around in an earlier era. It gives us a focus and sense of connection, even when we can't meet in person. For many Gen Zers, binging means watching TV shows like people read novels—episode by episode, all together in a seamless story. Understood in this way, binge watching is an active exercise, a mode of media consumption that includes content discovery, curation and connection with others, something all of us need—young people in particular—as we move on to new times. V

Five Actions Towards a Healthier Digital Life

CAROL TODD, BED, TLITE (TEACHING AND LEARNING IN A TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT DIPLOMA)

The tragic story of Amanda Todd not only changed my life as her mother but affected the lives of so many others. Amanda died by suicide on October 10, 2012. In the YouTube video she posted we all found out about her struggles with mental health, bullying and cyberbullying in addition to being exploited online by a predator who resides in the Netherlands.

Carol is a global advocate for anti-bullying, cyber abuse, digital safety and mental health. On October 10, 2012, Carol's daughter Amanda died by suicide after relentless exploitation online and cyberbullying. Carol is committed to being the voice that Amanda never had and continuing the conversation Amanda started with her now widely viewed video detailing her experiences.¹ Carol is Coordinator for Supportive Technologies and Digital Literacy for School District 43 (Coquitlam)

Carol and Amanda Todd

This person has now been convicted of the following criminal charges against Amanda: extortion, importing and distributing child pornography, possession of child pornography, communicating with the intent to lure a child and criminal harassment.

Much of Amanda's bullying occurred through the channels of the internet with her peers. Cyberbullying, or what I call *cyberabusive behaviours*, spread quickly and viciously. When Amanda became victim to this, she was unable to run away or hide. The online harassment was brutal and ongoing and followed her wherever she went. It was easy enough to say, "ignore it," "it will stop" or "delete your profiles," but we all know those words don't really

work. In Amanda's case, those weren't the answers.

Then there was the online exploitation—what we now call *sextortion*. Sextortion is a form of blackmail.² The RCMP defines it as "a situation where an online relationship evolves to the point where the suspect, whom the victim has only met online, requests the victim perform a sex act during an online video chat."³ The suspect then tells the victim they have recorded their interactions and makes demands and threats to release the video and possibly harm the family if the victim does not comply.

Ensuring that our children are safe online includes understanding how

technology works, why privacy online is important, what online behaviours are appropriate and who to trust in both the online and real worlds. When I speak to educators, parents and children and youth, digital awareness is on the forefront of conversations. They want to know about social media, cyberbullying, self-worth, self-image, consent, privacy, screen time—the list goes on. They want information, and they also want solutions. What can they do? What are the most trusted resources? How do they prioritize digital well-being in their everyday lives?

Based on my personal experiences and what I've learned from all of the amazing adults, youth and children I've spoken to in the nine years since Amanda's passing, I've narrowed these areas down to five action items I view as most important. Of course, this list isn't exhaustive. But to me, doing these five things can help improve digital wellness significantly.

Action 1: Stay educated

Knowledge of digital wellness, well-being and safety really is power. Educated adults can better navigate their own digital lives and model healthy behaviours for kids. This will also allow us as adults to be better equipped to have many of the hard, uncomfortable conversations about topics, like online exploitation, that need to be talked about.

It's important to identify reputable sources of information (like those included in the Related Resources list). Visit these sites often. Sign up for their newsletters. Subscribe to Google Alerts with applicable keywords, including *cyber safety*, digital wellness

and *cyberbullying*. You don't need to read everything. Pick and choose. But at least you'll be accessing this type of news regularly.

Introduce times to read news articles with your kids and talk about "real" versus "fake" news. Review how to look at facts and determine if they are plausible. Doing activities or taking online safety quizzes are great, productive uses of screen time.

Action 2: Have open conversations

It can be scary to talk about the darker side of the Internet, but these conversations are vital. If you feel uncomfortable talking to children about sexual health literacy and personal safety in the digital world, I recommend practising the conversations with other adults. Allow yourself to be honest and vulnerable with the kids in your life. Explain that these topics can be hard to talk about, but stress the importance of muddling through the discomfort together. We have to normalize these conversations.

With kids, I also stress the importance of having a circle of safe adults in their lives. Sometimes kids find it hard to talk to their parents about difficult topics. This could be because of cultural, language or religious barriers; relationship dynamics; or because parents just refuse to talk about these topics or struggle to be calm communicators and listeners. It is essential that kids have other safe adults in their lives whom they can talk to openly.

Practise scenarios with your kids about what they might encounter when using the internet and stress that when some-

thing online doesn't feel right, they should tell a trusted and safe adult.

Action 3: Set boundaries

No can be a really hard thing to say, even if everything inside you wants to say it. We have a lot of concerns about the word *no*. For instance, if we say *no*, maybe people will like or love us less. We may feel guilty or worry that we're making too big a deal about something. For kids, it can be hard to determine what is and isn't OK. Setting boundaries for something unfamiliar is especially hard.

I try to help students understand how their bodies react to certain feelings. I ask kids: if you are online and someone is asking you questions, how does it make you feel? Does your stomach get tight? Does your chest get heavy? Then I help them associate and name feelings typical of those sensations, like anxiety, worry, concern or fear. By validating their feelings, they can learn to trust themselves in identifying what is and is not OK. Practising this with a safe adult gives kids the experience they need to set boundaries.

Action 4: Reaching out to others

If Amanda knew that she wasn't alone, she would probably be alive today. Nobody is alone. Kids need to know there is always someone out there who can help them with whatever problem they have. The same is true for adults. If you are having negative experiences online or offline, it's important to connect with people who can support you without judgment. Keeping in negative emotions or experiences only strengthens shame and lets bad feelings spiral. Even though it may feel embarrassing

Photo credit: Dobrila Vignjevic at ©iStockphoto.com

> **Practise scenarios with your kids about what they might encounter when using the internet and stress that when something online doesn't feel right, they should tell a trusted and safe adult.** „

related resources

- Canadian Centre for Child Protection: protectchildren.ca
- Cybertip.ca: cybertip.ca
- ERASE (BC Ministry of Education and Child Care): www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase
- Kids Help Phone: kidshelpphone.ca
- Media Smarts: mediasmarts.ca
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC): missingkids.org/theissues/sextortion
- NetSmartz: missingkids.org/netsmartz
- Protect Kids Online: protectkidsonline.ca
- Telus Wise resources: telus.com/en/wise/resources/all/online-safety
- Thorn.org: thorn.org

to open up, in the end, asking for help is a positive thing.

Action 5: Take action

Develop a personal digital wellness action plan. Start by answering questions like:

- What are my goals?
- How am I going to achieve them?
- Who is going to help me?
- Where do I go if I'm stuck?

Digital wellness aligns with physical and mental wellness, so your plan should also include things like eating well, sleep, physical activity and finding a balance for your digital activities. Being digitally well is a lifestyle choice. It's a value system that starts when kids are really young and gets reinforced consistently throughout life.

Technology is not going away. This generation of kids is growing up surrounded by digital technology. It's all they know. And it's OK, too, that sometimes kids know more than us about how the digital world works. Even in our digitally connected world, there is still room for board games, outdoor activities and conversations around the dinner table. Kids learn from what they see. Adults must model healthy behaviours and habits. Showing them how digital well-being comes alive with awareness, boundaries and open conversations will go a long way to helping them understand and take care of their own digital wellness. v

Facing the Unexpected
USING VIRTUAL SERVICES FOR MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE PANDEMIC

MIKAELA LETOURNEAU

Hi. I'm Mikaela, and this is my COVID mental health story. I was diagnosed with my first three mental illnesses back in October 2016. I started taking medications for them, but I still didn't feel like me. That constant feeling of not having control of myself stayed and progressively got worse throughout high school.

Photo credit: tommaso79 at ©iStockphoto.com

Mikaela is a 20-year-old who is passionate about animals, film, music, makeup and mental health. In her free time she loves to listen to and collect Taylor Swift vinyl, spend time with her animals, family and friends and participate in mental health groups. Mikaela lives in the Fraser Valley

I didn't know what to do. I joined a mental health school treatment program called the Adolescent Day Treatment Program (ADTP). ADTP combined therapy, school and recovery. During that time, with the consistency of ADTP therapists and other help they offered, including life skills, outings and youth activity support, my mental health got better and was more manageable.

After I finished the program I transferred schools to give me a new start. At first things were going well, but that only lasted so long. The stress from school and social situations made it difficult for me to maintain my mental health and coping skills. I would end up in the hospital and miss school because I couldn't control myself.

COVID gets in the way

When the pandemic started, I was in my senior year of high school. I was already struggling mentally and any sense of normalcy was lost. The whole world changed. I made the decision to move in with my other parent. At first I was doing better. I stopped having nightmares and was around animals. When I started remote learning, that feeling of depression returned. All I could see was what I had just lost because of COVID: a prom experience, the grad events, getting a real gradu-

ation. I made some mistakes along the way after I stopped attending online classes. (I can say that now, as I self-reflect). As the pandemic went on, I like to say that I "de-progressed" and ended up in the hospital more frequently.

I knew there was something seriously wrong with me but I didn't know what. My parent tried to help. They took me out of the house, got me a guinea pig named Ojo because he brought me joy and did all they could to assist me with my mental health. While Ojo motivated me to be well, still nothing was working. I admit I was not on my medication properly, and that is my fault.

In 2021 things took a turn for the worse. In less than four months I was admitted into the hospital five times. Then, on March 29, 2021, my life completely changed. My parent said it was like someone else had taken me over, and I said and did things that were completely outside my personality. It was the worst incident that had ever happened to me. My blackout was not like others I had experienced before. I was admitted to the hospital again, but this wasn't like the previous times.

When I was finally me again, I found out that I had been diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder and schizophrenia. I was glad that I finally got some answers—not only for me, but for my family. I thought this was going to be like most trips: I would stay in the hospital for a few days and get my meds adjusted, since now we knew what was going on, then I would go home. I was completely wrong. I was extremely upset, as my nineteenth

birthday was coming up and I wanted to have fun. Instead of going behind my parents' back and doing dumb stuff on my birthday, I was in the psych ward. I had hit rock bottom. All sense of freedom was lost. I was under constant supervision from others.

Virtual help brings hope

I left the hospital on May 6, 2021, but I didn't go back to the real world yet. I went to a mental health recovery home. During my time there, I started taking control of getting help for myself. I couldn't leave for therapy, so I would do it virtually. I'm an introvert and it was more adaptable to my personality. I had my technology back and was able to communicate with people. I officially rejoined the world again on July 2, 2021. Simple things that I had once taken for granted, like eating what I wanted and taking walks alone, I suddenly appreciated a lot more.

I still use virtual mental health services. I have a way to get help while being in an environment that's most comfortable for me. I wake up each morning and one of my first thoughts is I'm happy to be alive. That's not something I thought I would ever feel again. There are still days I struggle, but that is expected. Virtual mental health services are a way I can talk things out when I'm not doing well and get an outsider's perspective on what to do.

I also recently completed an anxiety group therapy course through Foundry Virtual BC and have seen huge growth from that. I'm also actively involved in LGBTQ+ groups and will definitely participate in other groups through Foundry (foundrybc.ca) over the next year.

Mental health is a sickness. Nobody should judge you for it. If someone has asthma or knee issues, nobody judges them for it because it's not something they can control. Why is there so much judgment and stigma about mental health? It's not something people can control either. I am able to manage my mental health with medication and therapy, but I'm not perfect, I never will be and I'm OK with that now. I have good days, I have days that I am just OK, and then I have not-so-good days. I have not been in the hospital for over a year, and I am very grateful for that.

I'm thankful to my family members, who have stuck by my side, my friends, who have given me a second chance, and my job and my bosses, who make my work environment such a positive place. To anyone who is struggling: YOU ARE NOT ALONE. We all have hard times— trust me, I know. I'm grateful to the virtual mental health services that I've been able to access. If you feel like you are struggling, I encourage you to reach out to virtual services. No matter where you are, there is a way to get help. V

A New Way of Meeting Youth Where They're at

A SERVICE PROVIDER DISCUSSES FOUNDRY VIRTUAL BC'S FREE SERVICES

MIRANDA TYMOSCHUK*

At Foundry BC our goal is to provide youth with a safe space where they can access all their health and wellness services without going to a variety of clinics or telling their story over and over again. With more people choosing smart phone and web-based content, we knew Foundry needed a new way to connect with youth. So when COVID-19 hit, we jumped into action: we fast-forwarded online programming that had already been in the works and launched the free Foundry Virtual BC app.[1]

Photo credit: fizkes at ©iStockphoto.com

Miranda Tymoschuk has been a peer support worker for seven years. Prior to her work with Foundry Virtual BC, she supported peers in a variety of settings and assisted in developing curricula and training other peer support workers. She hopes to become a doctor while also learning from life with PTSD, chronic illness and disability

Through the app or our web portal[2] youth ages 12–24 can:

- schedule sessions with counsellors or peer support workers
- onnect with employment and education services
- join virtual groups
- access Indigenous Navigation and Wellness services for culturally appropriate support
- meet with a health care service navigator for support accessing primary care
- speak with a nurse practitioner regarding physical, sexual and mental health care options
- drop in online to access counselling, peer support and service navigation

In her work with Foundry, Miranda has been a strong advocate for peer support. Recently, Sierra Turner, Communications Coordinator for Foundry Virtual BC, asked Miranda about the transition to offering virtual support.

ST: What has the experience been switching from in-person to online service delivery?

MT: After doing peer support in person for many years it felt strange shifting to an online service delivery method. When working in person, it's possible to physically meet youth where they're at, be it in hospital, at a treatment centre, in the community or at a Foundry centre. We can reduce barriers by walking alongside youth as they work towards an overwhelming goal, like setting up a bank account or learning to ride the bus.

So I felt hesitant, at first, unsure whether I'd be able to provide a similar level of support. But I quickly learned that providing peer support in a virtual environment still allowed me to meet youth where they're at—just in a different way. For example, many of the youth who come to us either don't have in-person services accessible to them or are too anxious to go into a physical space and ask for help. We could suddenly reach youth who wouldn't have sought out help otherwise, while also supporting youth who found it easier to reach someone from their home, if transit or their location is a barrier.

It's also interesting to see how youth engage with us in a virtual environment. Since Foundry Virtual's services offer video, audio and chat messaging options, youth are able to book appointments based on their comfort level or the physical space they're in. We've had youth connect with us from their phone while on a hike, from their high school cafeteria or at home in their bedroom. Our main goal is to ensure that youth feel that they can talk to us wherever they are, however they want.

ST: How has the online landscape changed over time for youth in terms of health supports?

MT: As an integrated youth service, we can support multiple aspects of a young person's well-being. Many of the youth we have connected with are socially isolated and struggling in silence with a variety of issues, including school stress, body image, disordered eating, chronic pain, self-harm, substance use, anxiety and depression. Based on the overwhelmingly positive response we're getting,[3] we know virtual services can feel like a safer, more manageable first step towards asking for help. Folks have also reported significant

changes in feeling less lonely. We've seen that attending groups virtually can give youth an opportunity to socialize while developing skills and resiliency.

We've also noticed virtual services are filling gaps. We're more accessible, especially to those who live in rural or remote communities. Some youth from diverse populations, including IBPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+ and youth with disabilities, find our virtual services more inclusive and a better fit for their needs. Other youth have shared that, due to stigma, they sometimes feel uncomfortable walking into a physical space designated for mental health support. By using virtual services, they now have the option of easing in by starting the connection process online.

ST: What challenges or successes have you experienced?

MT: Chat and audio sessions were challenging at first. It was hard to gauge how someone was doing without seeing their body language. In chats, messaging back and forth can result in a delay or even misinterpretation. Over time, as a team, we have figured out what questions to ask to fill in the gaps where non-verbal communication would have helped.

In terms of successes, we don't want to take all the credit and say something was my success or our success as a team. It's the youth who are taking a step out of their comfort zone to ask for help; they're creating their own success. We just facilitate that process, helping guide youth on their journey.

> **It's been incredibly rewarding to see youth work so hard to do things they have either avoided or were too afraid to do for so long. We have seen youth connect with service providers after being let down many times, transition to in-person services despite hesitation, reach education or career goals and so much more.** ,,

It's been incredibly rewarding to see youth work so hard to do things they have either avoided or were too afraid to do for so long. We have seen youth connect with service providers after being let down many times, transition to in-person services despite hesitation, reach education or career goals and so much more. We are so proud of them, especially because many of us as peer support workers have been through similar struggles and can understand their challenges first-hand.

ST: What feedback have you received from youth?

MT: Youth have shown so much gratitude. It's amazing to hear that someone is feeling better than they ever thought possible, that they are finally developing friendships or that they're relieved to have addressed some of the stressors in their lives. As peer support workers, it's particularly rewarding to have a youth speak to the helpfulness of us sharing our lived experiences, and how they feel less alone knowing someone else has been through it. In this work, it's important that we ask for constructive feedback as well; if a youth didn't feel supported in the way they needed to be, we can adapt to more appropriately meet them where they're at.

* With questions by Sierra Turner, of Foundry Virtual BC. V

bit.ly/3EzvV5c

#OurAnxietyStories

Likes, Comments and Consumption

JUSTINE HARRIS-OWEN

I often wonder how my life would be different if the emergence and popularization of social media platforms had happened 10 years later. What if, when I was 10 years old, I hadn't been editing silly filters on my face? What would I have been doing instead? Who would I have spent my time with in high school if I hadn't made a group chat with my friends? What would my life look like now if I hadn't grown up in the new digital world?

Justine is a second-year student at SFU, where she studies cognitive science, with minors in French and creative writing. She hopes to pursue a career in artificial intelligence and analyze the impact of new technologies on mental health
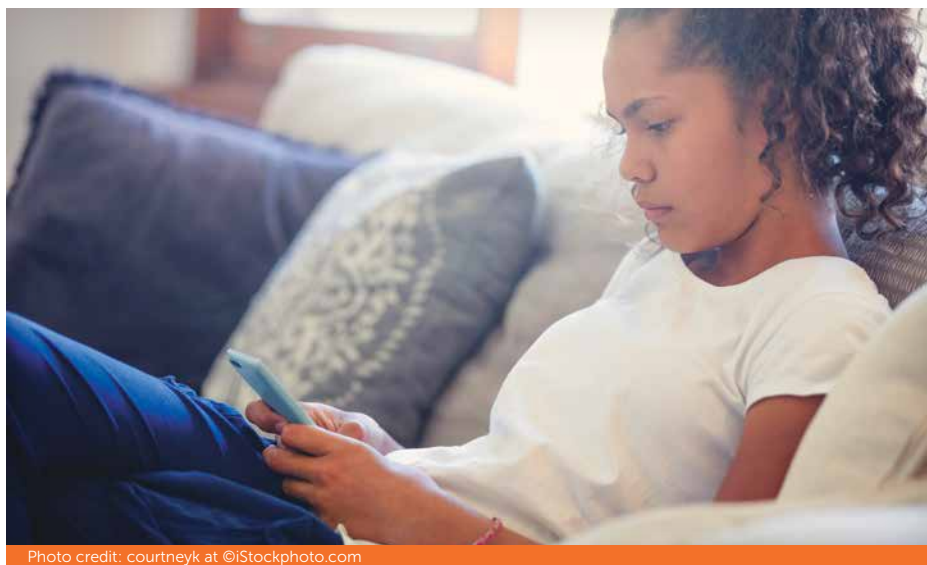
Photo credit: courtneyk at ©iStockphoto.com

When I first started using social media, my understanding of it was that it allowed people to maintain and make new relationships. Through social media, you could keep updated on the daily lives of loved ones, whether they lived next door or across the country. Instead of waiting to see a friend at school to tell them what you ate for dinner last night, you could post a picture of your plate on Instagram for them to see right away.

I remember one of my first posts on Instagram being a photo of my guinea pigs. I had crafted a mini cardboard stage for them to sit on, with colourful ribbon hats for them to wear, all framed by a red felt curtain. After posting it for my 30 or so followers (all friends I either knew from school and sports, plus family members) I stared at the screen until the first few "likes" rolled in.

I began checking Instagram more often, looking at everything on my feed. When I ran out of new posts from the people I followed, I would go to my Explore page. There, an endless stream of content selected for me appeared based on what kept my demographic on Instagram the longest. As a tween girl, this included fashion ideas, makeup tips and models telling me about their diets and what I could do to look like them. Most of that stuff didn't interest me, so I focused on the

funny text posts that were thrown in from time to time.

Although I was one of the first people in my grade to join social media, it did not take long for others to follow. Selfies and vacation pics filled my feed. With the constant stream of "self-improvement" content and my own comparisons to friends' photos, my self-esteem definitely took a hit. Suddenly, the silly, filtered photos I was sharing seemed childish. I deleted everything I'd shared and limited my Instagram use to liking other people's posts and commenting if I could think of anything funny to say. Eventually, if I felt I looked good in a picture, I would post it on Instagram, hoping to get as many likes as possible. To get more likes, I needed more people to see my posts. I started accepting anyone who requested to follow me.

At 15 years old, I was willing to give anyone with an Instagram account access to photos of me and my friends, as well as personal information, like the city I lived in. I was also allowing anyone to message me anything they wanted. Like most teenagers, I was insecure and desperate for reassurance. Acceptance seemed like the most important thing in the world. As much as my parents had explained the dangers of trusting random people on the internet, a stranger messaging me and telling me they thought I was cool or pretty was very exciting. Back then, these messages seemed novel, even flattering. Any attention, no matter the type, felt positive.

I knew that others around me felt this way too when a close friend posted an edited photo of herself. She had smoothed the shape of her nose,

removed the blemishes from her skin and pinched her waist to look smaller. When we were hanging out, friends would ask me to take hundreds of pictures of them in an attempt to have a single one that was "good enough" for Instagram. Spending time with friends devolved into taking pictures at pretty murals or aesthetic coffee shops. Friends would even message me immediately after posting, asking me to go like and comment.

My time spent on Instagram skyrocketed to upwards of four hours a day. Friends would come over and we would talk a while before sitting on our phones in silence. I spent less time reading and writing. How could I dedicate an hour of my time to practising the same song on the guitar when I could scroll on Instagram and see a thousand different things? I felt seen and overwhelmed, but also lonely and empty. The social connections I was promised when first joining Instagram had transformed into an endless loop of performance and consumption. I stopped posting on Instagram completely and told myself I had to get off the app. Every time I closed it though, I found myself reaching for it, or a similar app, a few minutes later. As much as I wanted to delete it, there was always something holding me back. It was an addiction.

Social media has been so fundamental in my adolescence. I am emotionally attached to these apps like I am to the town I grew up in. All my friends are there. Memories are stored there. Criticisms I see of social media from people who did not grow up with it can register as insulting. These are especially harsh when young people get the blame for a lack of responsi-

bility, rather than the companies that manipulate us on these platforms.

Even so, I am very critical of my social media use these days. I am slowly lowering how much time I spend on Instagram and other platforms. I make sure what I'm looking at and my inter-actions online serve a purpose outside of mindless consumption. As social media continues to grow, I'm not sure what the future of these platforms will look like. I do know, however, that when the sole purpose of an app is to tempt you to scroll for hours and deplete your confidence, people suffer. In the end, we are driven to beg for instant moments of gratification before the relief fades and we are left wanting again.V

stay safe and healthy online

Keep your accounts secure

Use a reputable password manager. Long random passwords with a mix of upper and lower case letters, numbers, and characters are safest but hard to remember. A password manager does the hard work for you.

- **Use two-factor authentication** whenever possible.
- **Don't use the same password** or a similar password for every account. It means thieves only have to guess one password to access everything.
- **Don't use words or numbers that can be easily guessed** through your social media, like your school, favourite sports team, or birthday.

Take control of your online life

- **Assume that nothing online is private** and anonymous, even if you think you're in a private and anonymous space. Anything you post online can be archived and shared with people you don't know. Think before you post: would you be okay if someone took a screenshot or archive?
- **Read through privacy settings** and think carefully about what is best for you.
- **Regularly look at your old posts, photos, or videos** and delete anything you no longer want on your account. You can also untag yourself if someone else tags you.
- **Delete or deactivate old accounts** you no longer use.
- **Use block features** if someone starts to bother you or ask you for things. You don't owe strangers anything and no one has the right to ask you for personal information, photos, or videos.

Show care for others

- **Since social media accounts can be found by anyone, think twice about posting hurtful content.** Sharing hateful posts, talking badly about others, and complaining about your boss can come back to hurt you.
- **Cyberbullying is still bullying** and people behind usernames are still humans with feelings. Using apps or sites to stalk, threaten, harass, or just plain bully someone else just because you can do it somewhat

anonymously is a sign that you need to step away from those platforms and take care of yourself.

- **Humour that relies on stereotypes, misinformation, and prejudice is not funny.** These so-called "jokes" can be tactics used to make you more comfortable with content that doesn't fit your personal beliefs or values. Be critical of the media you consume.
- **If someone sends you private information or photos, do not share these with anyone else.**

Take care of yourself

Time online needs to be in balance with the rest of your life. That balance looks different for everyone, but it should include:

- **Spending time with friends and family** offline.
- **Moving your body** every day.
- Taking time for **healthy meals.**
- **Putting screens away at night** so you get a good night's sleep.

If you have a hard time disconnecting, it's a good idea to talk to your school counsellor or a parent. Foundry BC is another great resource for people ages 12-24: foundrybc.ca.

Crime happens online

- **Be careful about who you share photos or private information with.** Someone else may gain access to these and threaten to show others if you don't do what they ask (like send explicit photos/videos or money). In some cases, the person committing a crime pretends to be your friend and encourages you to take explicit or embarrassing phots or videos. In other cases, they use content you think you've sent to someone like a match on a dating app.
- **Don't share your banking information.** Criminals can send emails or messages that look legitimate asking you to provide personal information. They can then use that information to access bank accounts or other important things. Places like banks will never ask for your account information and passwords.

If you think you've experienced a crime, tell an adult and call your police non-emergency number.

The Gift of Screens

MALCOLM*

"If it's a question of letting him play video games or coming to the ER—let him play video games." This was the advice the psychiatrist gave us in our exit interview after our nine-year-old son spent the weekend in the Children and Adolescent Psychiatric Emergency (CAPE) unit at BC Children's Hospital.

Photo credit: andreswd at ©iStockphoto.com

Malcolm is a full-time dad, a peer support worker for parents and caregivers whose kids are experiencing mental health challenges, and a writer and illustrator of comics for exceptional kids. He lives in Coquitlam

* pseudonym

Sleep has never come easily for our son, which has drastically limited his resources for coping with life's challenges. On top of insomnia, he's autistic, lives with ADHD and is gifted. He is also deeply empathetic and brilliant, with a huge heart. My relationship with him has taught me so much about myself.

Even as new parents, my partner and I were aware that magazines and websites devoted to parenting had a clear message about screen time: good parents keep their kids outside, inspired, engaged; lazy parents let their kids use screens. Screen time is to be used as currency and kept super rare so it can motivate or punish kids.

Once, when he was two, we tried taking away screen time as a consequence. It went like this:

Me/my partner: "If you don't come right now, you can't watch TV at all this afternoon."My son: "I am never watching TV again."He kept his word until two months later when *we* finally needed a break from his constant attention and plunked him down in front of the TV.

Our son has laser beam–like focus. He's what our psychologist has described as an "extremely high-need child." He could never comfortably play by himself. He was no more than four when his gifted brain developed an awareness of mortality.

He realized that things and people could go away and never come back. He needed constant reassurance that we were there. He craved attention. If he was drawing pictures, he needed us to comment on what he was drawing. Even watching TV he would frequently look back at us, studying our faces for reactions to what was happening onscreen. It was gratifying to be so connected to our child, but it was also exhausting.

The same year he started school, we had a second child. These two events heightened his anxiety to an extreme degree. He couldn't be alone, but he couldn't be in the same room as his infant sister because of the sensory overwhelm of autism. He was in a constant state of panic and despera-tion. We had a newborn, whom we adored, and this exceptional boy who was trying his hardest to be OK. We were desperate to take care of every-body and relied heavily on our family for support.

Self-soothing with video games

When our son discovered video games it was a revelation for us all. Here was a challenge for his big brain: puzzles, riddles, exercises for his hand-eye coordination. Games provided real-time feedback. They gave him some-thing to succeed at, which soothed his perfectionism. Gaming could be stressful, too, but it gave him a way of briefly putting aside the anxiety that plagued him.

We knew there was a chance he would use screens compulsively, and we had conflicted reactions to his new passion. Obviously, we didn't want him to lose his connection to the world, becoming a screen zombie who didn't want

to do anything but plug in. But we could see how it quieted his spirit, how his body just seemed to relax in a way that didn't happen out "in the world." Other than turning screens off two hours before bedtime, our limits became looser and looser.

The spring he turned nine, as the days got longer, he stopped sleeping. He seemed to live in the extremes of self-loathing and rage. He tried to get out of our moving car. He attacked us. He tried running into traffic. It was devastating, and we wondered if our precious boy would ever rest again. We were sleep deprived too, sleeping in shifts. We were stuck trying to keep our family safe from his volatility and trying not to blame ourselves for his condition—trying, too, to allow his sister to grow up feeling safe and to leave room for a good sibling connec-tion later.

And we found ourselves at the place that our culture had warned us about: video games to the exclusion of all else. Where he had once loved drawing, making up stories and moving his body, now he only wanted to play his games. Sometimes we felt we had let him down by letting him have so much time with the screen. But the reaction when we had to separate him from his device was painful and dangerous for all of us.

Taking the pressure off

After multiple trips to the ER at BC Children's, we realized that he needed help we couldn't provide at home and admitted him to the CAPE unit. It was a hard decision, but thankfully our FamilySmart peer support worker helped us stay in the mindset that this was best for him.[1] It wasn't an easy

weekend, but we did get a couple of nights of unbroken sleep. As we prepared to leave, we met with the psychiatrist on call.

We confided our secret shame: we were letting our son play video games whenever he wanted. Should we regulate his screen time? How do we handle the fallout? It's a fight every time. We have to physically tear it away from him, and he rages and attacks until we are genuinely worried for our safety.

The doctor's reaction was unexpected: "If it's a question of letting him play video games or coming to the ER—let him play video games." He reassured us that we were doing all we could. Our son was taking the best medicine available. All we could do was wait. No progress could be made until his nervous system started to settle. "At that point, you may find that he puts the screen down himself. But either way, be gentle with yourselves. Your whole family has to get through this in one piece. He's safe, he's home, let him feel OK, and let yourselves rest too."

We have been so grateful for that advice. Removing that battle from our relationship with our son left us room for connection. As predicted, he did start to feel better, and he did move away from constant gaming. When life is stressful, he sometimes retreats back into the digital world, but we take solace in the fact that he will emerge again, and that his ability to soothe himself is a wonderful gift. V

Comparison is the Thief of Joy*—
for Some of Us

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA "INFLUENCES" OUR EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

CARLY A. PARSONS, MA

For many of us, it's hard to imagine going through our days without access to Google, email or our various social media accounts: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and the like. According to Statista, about 89% of the Canadian population uses at least one social media platform.[1] These platforms are hubs of social connection where we keep in touch with others, receive invitations to social events, remember birthdays and more. They're also where we go for entertainment, information and self-expression.

Carly A. Parsons

Carly lives in Vancouver, where she is completing her PhD in clinical psychology at UBC. Her research examines the emotional impacts of online behaviours like browsing, especially for people who struggle with anxiety. Outside of graduate school, Carly enjoys dancing, reality TV and exploring Vancouver's food scene

We tend to be pretty careful about what we present about ourselves on our social accounts—and exactly how we present it. For example, you're more likely to post about a recent achievement or milestone, such as a job promotion, than the setbacks and obstacles that came before it. You're also more likely to post an Instagram Story of your delicious brunch than about the 45 minutes you spent waiting for your table. You may have heard the term "highlight reels," which is used to describe the curated content people post, or the warning not to compare these with the behind-the-scenes of your life. This is easier said than done, and we sometimes finish our scrolling sessions with the feeling that we don't measure up.

Scroll at your own risk

Of the ways we can spend time on social media, scrolling might be particularly harmful to our mental health. Researchers often divide

social media behaviours into *active* behaviours (e.g., sending a direct message, commenting on a friend's photo) and *passive* behaviours (e.g., browsing someone's profile or the main feed). Several studies have found a link between passive social media use and negative emotional outcomes, including higher stress, feelings of loneliness and depression, and decreased life satisfaction.[2] What's more, these studies have typically found that social comparison underlies these effects.[3]

Because of the tendency to share only the highlights of our lives, browsing others' posts can lead to many *upward social comparisons*, where we see others as better than ourselves in some way. There is some evidence that even a single browsing session can lower our mood and self-esteem due to upward social comparisons. In a study by my research team, some university students reported declines in their self-perceptions, seeing themselves as more inferior while browsing the profiles of local Instagram influencers. These worsened perceptions led to lower mood and self-esteem by the end of browsing.[4]

Such outcomes are always a risk when we go online, but might be especially likely when we browse the profiles of influencers or celebrities, whose lives and appearances seem ideal and unattainable. Still, since many of us try to present our ideal selves online (e.g., with filters and editing apps), even our friends' profiles might make us feel this way. Social media use is also negatively related to body image, particularly on visual platforms like Instagram.[5] The idealized, edited images on these platforms are linked

to body dissatisfaction, and this is true regardless of gender.[6]

Know yourself before you network

In other cases, our individual differences do impact how vulnerable we are to the effects of browsing. For example, if I'm a perfectionist who holds myself to a very high standard, I'm likely to feel more dissatisfied with my body when browsing other people's photos.[7] The same would be true if I have a *high social comparison orientation*.[6] Having a high social comparison orientation means you compare yourself to others more often (e.g., your physical appearance, your income, your social popularity) *and* that you are more affected by the comparisons you make.

Your social comparison orientation is related to other characteristics, like your level of depression or social anxiety. Socially anxious people make more upward social comparisons and are more sensitive to the effects of these comparisons.[8] In our study, students with more social anxiety felt more inferior and had greater decreases in mood and self-esteem while browsing influencer profiles.[4] Their worsened self-esteem included worsened feelings about their physical appearance.

There are other factors that impact how we're each affected by social media. As some researchers have pointed out,[3,9] the effects of browsing are inconsistent and depend on factors including gender, culture and the type of content we browse. Some people might even feel better after they go online, as upward social comparison can also lead to positive

feelings including inspiration, motivation and optimism. Case in point: in our study, university students with low levels of social anxiety experienced more positive self-perceptions while browsing influencer profiles.[4]

And while its effects also differ from person to person, active social media use is linked to positive psychological outcomes, like less loneliness and more life satisfaction.[2] The best kind of active social media use is *interactive*, involving communication with others. In other words, social media can boost your well-being, especially if you use it as its name suggests: to be social.

So to get the most out of your accounts, use them to foster social connections: create that birthday event on Facebook; message your new LinkedIn connection to set up a lunch meeting; and reply to your cousin's Instagram story to let them know it brought a smile to your face. Even better, interact in person! In a study that took place over a 10-day period, researchers found that social media use—especially social comparison— worsened mood, while in-person social interactions had the opposite effect.[10] But for those moments when all you feel like doing is scrolling, consider setting a time limit. And most importantly, remind yourself that the highlight reel you see is just a snapshot of a fuller, richer, more complex story. V

*Expression alternately attributed to former US President Theodore Roosevelt and Dr. Ray Cummings.

Parenting Tips for the Age of Disaster Media

FERMA RAVN-GREENWAY, BSW, MSW, RSW

As a play therapist working in Burnaby and Vancouver, I have often witnessed how children process highly publicized tragedies, like shootings, COVID-19 and natural disasters, through their play and conversations.

Ferma Ravn-Greenway

Ferma is a family therapist who works with kids, teens and families doing play therapy, DIR Floortime (a developmental and relational form of therapy for kids and teens), CBT and family systems therapy. She is also a hatha and vinyasa yoga teacher. Her big loves are her husband, seven-year-old son and four-month-old Bernedoodle

In 2020 when COVID-19 restrictions began and most children were unable to attend daycare, preschool or elementary school, I observed a trend where my virtual play therapy sessions consisted of many children playing doctor to sick stuffies in make-believe hospitals. Later in 2021 while visiting the gaming platform Roblox with older clients, I saw how exposure to media about mass shootings gave rise to popular minigames that recreated school shootings.

In all of these instances I was and continue to be deeply struck by school-aged children's awareness of these tragedies, and how kids make sense of them through their conversations and play with others. In an environment where smartphones, tablets, TVs, computers and other screens are easily accessed by children, parents and other caregivers need to know that it is very likely children will hear about and/or watch media coverage of large-scale disasters.

Kids often catch glimpses of the news while their parents are watching or will listen to household members speaking about what they have seen on TV or online. This makes it vital for parents to turn off the TV or other news sites during a publicized disaster when their kids are close by and wait until their kids are in bed or out of the house to discuss worries and concerning details.

Even for parents who are very careful about screen use at home, discus-

sions with peers and friends can give children potentially distressing information about these events. It is my hope that this article will provide readers with an idea of how to help their children process concerning material they see in the media using the three simple strategies that follow.

1. Be present and calm

Research shows that children need present, calm parents and caregivers to process stressful events.[1] Being present as a parent is more than just being physically available. It means removing distractions like phones, laptops or other diversions and giving full attention to the child with openness and love. This creates a sense for a child that they matter and provides a space for them to express what they

are thinking and feeling. When we are present as parents and pay full attention it is also more likely that we will notice if a child is distressed about material they have seen through the media. It is important to set time aside each day to be fully present with our children, especially when kids are hearing or seeing stories about a large-scale disaster.

2. Reflect children's feelings

Often as parents we want to tell our child not to feel a certain way or distract them from challenging feelings. For instance, when a child is scared about something, a common adult response is, "Don't feel scared!" This can create problems for children, as it teaches them that having difficult feelings is not OK or that feelings

cannot be handled, either by them alone or by the parent. It can also make children feel unheard.

A great way for parents to support a child when they have been exposed to news about a tragedy is to reflect back the feelings the child expresses. For example, a parent might reflect to a child crying sadly after seeing a video about the war in Ukraine, "I can see how sad you are. It can feel overwhelming to see a video like that." Reflecting what a child feels helps them to name their feelings, which research shows is a tool to calm big emotions.[1] It also helps kids to feel open about expressing their feelings, knowing that their emotions will be accepted by their parents and not brushed aside.

3. Keep information developmentally appropriate

One of the most difficult parts of helping children process disaster-related news they have seen or heard is knowing how much to say to them about the event. For school-aged children it is helpful for parents to discuss these events with their child before they hear about it from friends or on the news, as this can protect kids from believing exaggerations or mistruths about what actually happened.

Events can be shared very simply with younger school-aged children (e.g., "Russia has started a war in the country Ukraine and you might hear friends or adults talking about it. In Canada we are safe. Do you have any questions about this?"). For older school-aged children parents will likely need to talk about more details, but the focus should be on answering questions children have (e.g., "Russia

Photo credit: FG Trade at ©iStockphoto.com

It is important to set time aside each day to be fully present with our children, especially when kids are hearing or seeing stories about a large-scale disaster. 99

has started a war in the Ukraine and there is concern about civilians, as some cities are being bombed. Do you have any questions about this?").

Adults should spare kids violent, unnecessary details (e.g., do not ask kids if they have seen pictures of a specific bombing site on the internet). The aim of these conversations with children of any age should be to answer any questions they have and reassure them that they are safe.

In an age when news travels fast and is easily accessible, parents have an important role to play in ensuring kids can process news about large disasters. V

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GET HELP WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH JOURNEY

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Wellness Module 10: Staying Mentally Healthy with Technology
heretohelp.bc.ca/wellness-module/wellness-module-10-staying-mentally-healthy-with-technology
Technology like your phone and social media apps can boost your well-being at times, but it can also harm your well-being at other times. This Wellness Module helps you find a more balanced approach.

Foundry BC
foundrybc.ca
Mental and physical health care, peer support, and programs for young people ages 12-24. Services are available online through the Foundry Virtual BC app and there are in-person centres in many communities across BC.

MediaSmarts
mediasmarts.ca
Learn and practice digital and media literacy skills like recognizing fake news, thinking critically, and setting healthy boundaries. There are also resources for parents and teachers

Kids Help Phone
kidshelpphone.ca
Tips and tools for young people to think about social media and stay safe online. Find resources like:

- Online dating: Safety tips (kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/online-dating-safety-tips)

- Social media: Resources to support your mental health (kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/social-media-resources-to-support-your-mental-health)
- Digital detox: How to unplug and recharge (kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/digital-detox-unplug-recharge)

Jessie's Legacy
jessieslegacy.com
Information and resources for youth and families about body image, disordered eating, and eating disorders, including social media's influence on body image and dieting.

Amanda Todd Legacy Society
amandatoddlegacy.org/get-help-and-resources
Find a library of resources on online safety, bullying, cybercrimes, and exploitation.

Canadian Centre for Child Protection
protectchildren.ca
The Canadian Centre for Child Protection works to protect children's safety. Learn more on Cybertip.ca (a tool for reporting online child sexual abuse and exploitation), projects that educate everyone about online child abuse and exploitation, and age-appropriate resources on online safety.

This list is not comprehensive and does not necessarily imply endorsement of all the content available in these resources.