

# CASE SCENARIO FOR PROVIDERS

## SOCIAL MEDIA CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUTH AND FAMILIES

### Counseling Appointment with Bryce (17)

Pediatric and adolescent providers can integrate conversations about media use into health consultations with increased confidence knowing that their acknowledgement and guidance can have a positive influence on youth and families. A healthy relationship with a trusted adult is a protective factor for youth mental health, and many young people trust health care providers' expertise.<sup>1</sup> Talk about digital media in the spirit of health and wellness, not judgment and control. Engage with youth and their caregivers by demonstrating curiosity and offering your partnership<sup>2</sup>.



**TIP:** Submit any questions you have to the [AAP Center for Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health Q&A Portal](#) for a personalized and evidence-based response. Patients and their parents or guardians can also look to the portal for additional support outside of the office.

The [AAP's policy statement](#) on media use offers some key recommendations for pediatricians.



CENTER OF EXCELLENCE  
Social Media and  
Youth Mental Health  
FROM THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

## MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

**Motivational interviewing is a specific method of talking with people about change and growth that strengthens their own motivation and commitment. This evidence-based process, which is grounded in research about what makes conversations more or less helpful, allows others to explore change more comfortably. Relational skills include demonstrating compassion, acceptance, partnership and empowerment. Technical skills include asking open-ended questions, using affirmations and reflective listening statements, and summarizing the discussion. Because change is a process and rarely a straight line, the discussion moves like a dance and takes into consideration the person's values, beliefs, age, culture and social structures.**

**Bryce is 17 years old. He received a positive PRIUSS-3 screen<sup>1</sup> for problematic media use at his most recent school-based health center visit. His pediatrician referred him to the school-based Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic's licensed social worker for additional care. During that appointment, Bryce shares that late-night social media use has disrupted his sleep. Bryce and his social worker are now developing a plan to address these concerns.**



**Clinician:** You shared with me that you often stay up on your phone scrolling without realizing how late it gets. You are not alone in this. Scrolling can be a way to unwind, but it can be hard to stop. When you think about your goals related to school, activities and friends how do your current technology habits fit in? **(Compassion, Acceptance, Empowerment, Open-ended question)**

**Bryce:** Honestly, they don't. I want to keep my grades up, and I don't like feeling tired during the day.



**Clinician:** Getting good grades is important to you. Noticing the impact and wanting things to change shows great insight. What do you think would help your phone use fit in better with your goals? What strategies have you considered trying? **(Reflection, Affirmation, Open-ended question)**

**Bryce:** I'm not sure. I know some of my friends set screen-time limits for specific apps. I guess I could try that and see if it helps.



**Clinician:** Like your friends, you see an opportunity to make adjustments to your screen time. That sounds like a great place to start. Teenagers usually need eight to 10 hours of sleep per night — and screens can make it harder to fall asleep. Screen-time limits might help you notice how long you are on specific apps and remind you to check in with yourself to see if you need a break. If you notice you aren't feeling great during the breaks, we can talk about some calming techniques during our next session. Would you be open to a brief homework assignment this week? **(Reflection, Affirmation, Open-ended question)**

**Bryce:** I don't know. What is it?



**Clinician:** One technique that can help involves self-monitoring to build awareness of your behavior, thoughts, and feelings. This week, would you be willing to track what you're feeling and thinking when on your phone, and what keeps you scrolling? Take quick notes on your experience to help you remember for our next discussion. How does that sound? **(Partnership, Acceptance, Open-ended questions)**

**Bryce:** That sounds OK. I can try it this week.



**Clinician:** Let's take a moment now to write down what you'll be tracking this week – feelings and thoughts you have while on your phone and the reasons you continue to scroll. We'll take our next several sessions to dig deeper into how your media use affects your goals and overall wellbeing. I can also share some resources on healthy digital boundaries, and we can discuss more next time we meet. How do you feel about that plan? **(Partnership, Open-ended question)**

**Bryce:** I guess that works.



**Clinician:** Great. So, to recap today's discussion: You shared that your evening social media use has led to you feeling tired and stuck in a cycle you don't want to be in. You want to make a change, so you're going to start being more aware of when you use social media and how you're feeling and thinking when using it. We'll chat next week about what you noticed and develop the plan more from there – whether that's creating an evening routine, trying out a few regulation techniques or finding other ways to feel connected with friends without staying up so late. Do you have any questions for me? **(Summarizing, Partnership, Acceptance)**

**Bryce:** No, not right now.



**Clinician:** You've been really brave today in opening up about this. We'll take it one step at a time, together. **(Affirmation, Empowerment, Partnership, Acceptance)**

## SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where did the teen engage in self-reflection about what might help moving forward?
2. How were realistic goals and digital boundaries co-created with the teen?
3. How did the clinician introduce accountability while preserving autonomy?
4. In what ways did the homework assignment support self-monitoring and self-regulation?
5. What would you do differently in this interaction to support growth and change?
6. Where were instances of Bryce's change talk?
7. How can you continue to intentionally guide teen clients to connect their digital habits with the outcomes they care about – such as sleep, friendships or academic success?

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND MIDDLE ADOLESCENCE: WHAT SHOULD BE ON YOUR RADAR:

An adolescent's drive for independence becomes stronger and there may be increases in parent-teen conflict. Teens have more choices and independence around the media content they choose, which may be content that is quite different than what they had seen as a child.

Media use can be a part of healthy and normal adolescent development, communication and peer relationship building. This can also be a period in which peer relationships can endure rocky times and challenging situations, some of which can be exacerbated by digital communications.

Middle adolescence can also be a time of intense pressure for conformity across some teens. This pressure, combined with the tendency of middle adolescent age youth to see themselves as unbreakable, can lead to risky behavior.



## RESOURCES

### FOR PROVIDERS:

Visit the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\) Center of Excellence](#) on Social Media and [Youth Mental Health website](#) and check out the following resources for more information and tools:

- **AAP:** [The 5 Cs of Media Use](#)
- **HealthyChildren.org:** [Family Media Plan](#)
- **Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers:** [Understanding Motivational Interviewing](#)
- **National Council for Mental Wellbeing:** [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#)

Access the following resources for information you can share directly with parents:

- **AAP:**
  - [Family Social Media Tip Sheet](#)
  - [Glossary of Digital Media Platforms](#)
  - [Social Media: Enjoy the Upsides and Avoid the Downsides](#)
  - [Social Media Tips for Teens](#)
  - [Problematic Media Use: Screening and Intervention Tools for Clinicians](#)
- **Common Sense Media:** [Parents' Ultimate Guide to TikTok](#) (subscription required)
- **Healthychildren.org:** [For Teens: Creating Your Personal Stress-management Plan](#)
- **Crisis Lines:**
  - The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services' National Helpline](#) (800-662-4357 [HELP]) is a 24/7 treatment referral and information service.
  - The [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) offers 24/7, confidential support for people in distress.
- **National Council for Mental Wellbeing:**
  - [Youth Hub](#)
  - [Getting Candid](#)
  - [Get Ready With Me for a Healthy Night's Sleep](#) (TikTok)

### FOR PARENTS:

- **Family Social Media Tip Sheet:** [CoE\\_one\\_pager\\_with\\_disclaimer.pdf](#)
- **Glossary of Media Terms:** [Glossary of Digital Media Platforms](#)
- **The Good and Bad of Social Media:** [The Good and Bad of Social Media: What Research Tells Us](#)
- **Conversation Starters:** [Conversation Starters for Families About Media](#)

### FOR TEENS:

- **Social Media Tips for Teens:** [Social Media Tips for Teens | AAP](#)
- **The Calm Toolbox:** [The Calm Toolbox: Healthy Ways to Cope With Stress](#)

## REFERENCES

1. Moreno, M. A., Arseniev-Koehler, A., & Selkie, E. (2016). [Development and Testing of a 3-Item Screening Tool for Problematic Internet Use](#). *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 176, 167-172.E1.
2. Snell, A. & Kline, J. (2022, July-October). Findings from an online assessment of youth ages 13-18 years old [Unpublished internal document]. Commissioned from Lake Research Partners by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

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