

Teens, Tweeting, texting and trouble

Parents who worry about what their children are doing in their spare time will take little comfort with the answer: They are talking on their cell phones, Tweeting, texting surfing, gaming and watching TV more than seven hours a day. Some, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation study, spend up to 16 hours a day on these electronic pursuits.

And guess what: The heaviest users tend to be heavier in weight, sadder and bored, with more problems in school and with their parents than moderate users.

A moderate user spends about three hours a day using electronic devices. And guess what: the less they spend texting, Tweeting, talking and watching TV, the better their grades. They tend to participate in more activities that require interpersonal skills, and they have after-school activities that don't involve texting, Tweeting, etc.

Want more statistics? Average children ages 8 to 18 actually pack nearly 11 hours of texting, Tweeting, etc., into seven and one-half hours — by multitasking, such as talking on their cell phones and watching YouTube at the same time. It's like a one-man band, and the concert is getting longer.

Five years ago, the average tween and teen spent one hour less a day texting, Tweeting, etc.

Small wonder the average times are increasing: Two-thirds of children in the 8-to-18 age group have cell phones. Seventy percent have

TVs in their rooms and about one-third have computers with Internet access in their rooms.

How does a typical day break down? (Remember, the totals are higher because kids are multitasking.)

Watching TV: 4.5 hours

Listening to music:
2.5 hours

Computer use: 1.5 hours

Video games: 1.25 hours

Reading print media:
38 minutes

Watching movies:
25 minutes

How are parents coping? Some are taking cell phones away at 10 p.m. and limiting TV and computer use. But parents who let their kids have TVs and Internet access in their bedrooms might be asking for trouble.

The study was based on 2,000 students in grades 3 to 12, and was conducted between October 2008 and May 2009. One researcher, citing astonishing results in a 2004 study, told The New York Times he didn't think media use could go any higher than that study found.

And today's kids seem to be on a path toward even higher numbers. Stay tuned for the real shocker in the next study.

Daily Breeze. 27 Jan 2010 P.A.14