

Smart Use of Smart Phones: Child/Adolescent Development and Navigating Social Media

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Getting started

- **Thank you!**
- **Didactic vs. conversation – please ask questions!**
- **Tell them what they're going to learn...**

What will we discuss?

- **The relationship of social media to kids and teens**
- Confusing? Scary? Uncertainty?
- How do we deal with this? Education – for kids and adults – that is evidence-based and scientifically supported.
- How can we harness it to help them?



What will we discuss?

- **The relationship of social media to kids and teens**
- Review of basic developmental theories
- Current literature about risks and benefits of social media
- Tips and interventions that are research-based
- Other questions





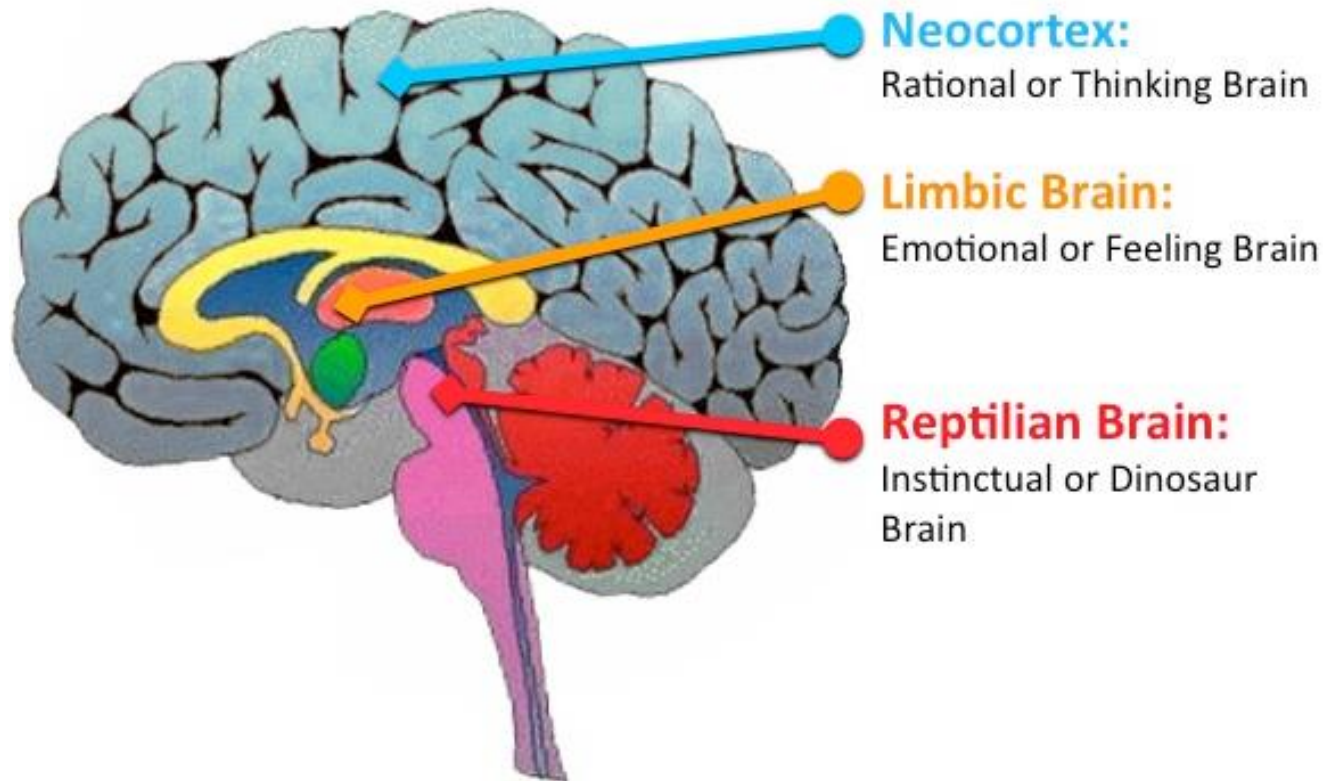
Review of developmental factors

- Any human development involves three types of change
- Biological
- Psychological
- Social



Developmental factors - Biology

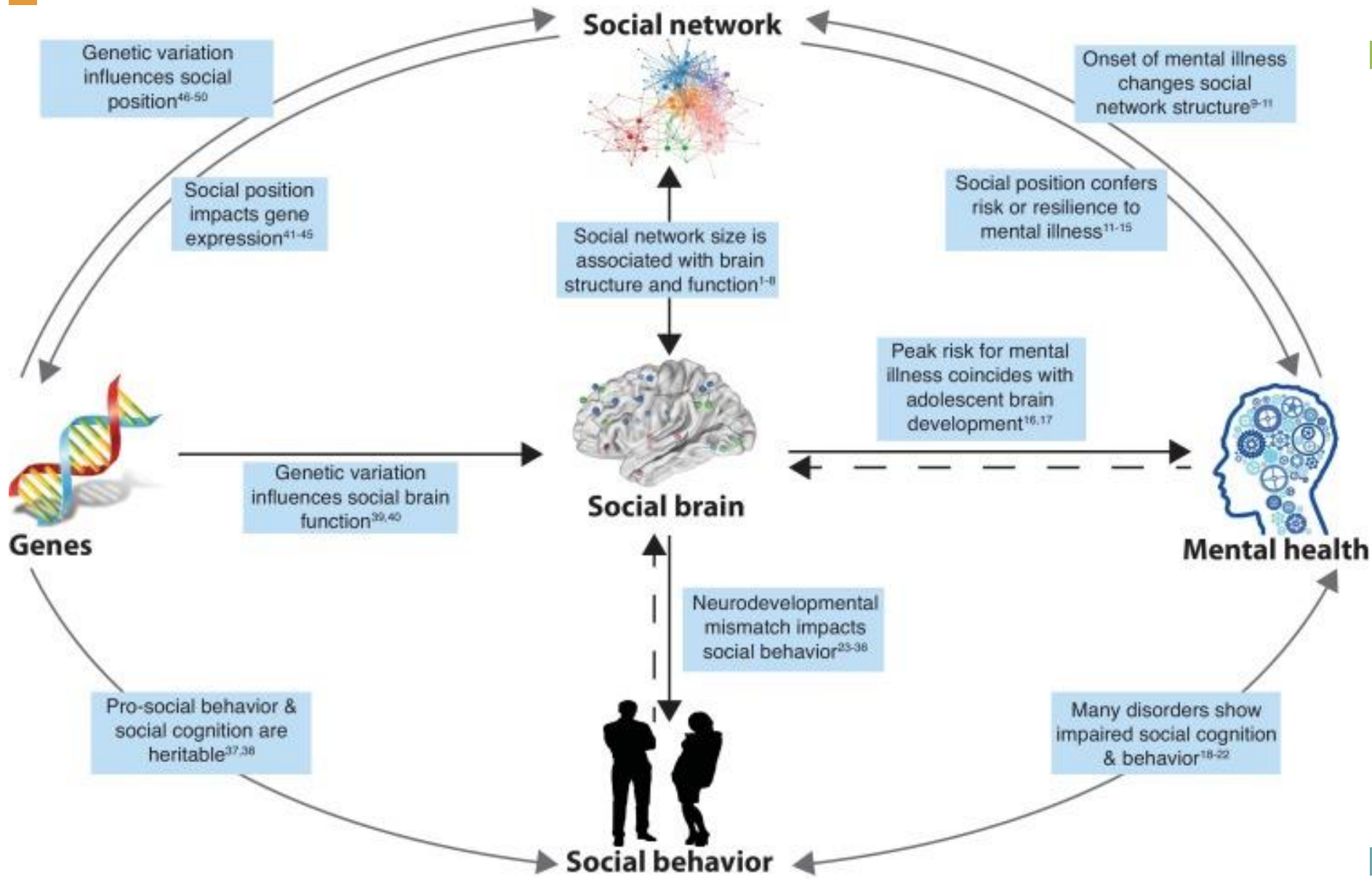
- Significant change in this age range



Developmental factors - Biology

- **How does this relate to the social world?**
- It enables us to learn to navigate sociocultural aspects of functioning
- Learning affects the physical architecture of our brains – sprouting and pruning
- Affected by social media use?

Developmental factors - Psychology



Developmental factors - Psychology

Two major developmental tasks of adolescence

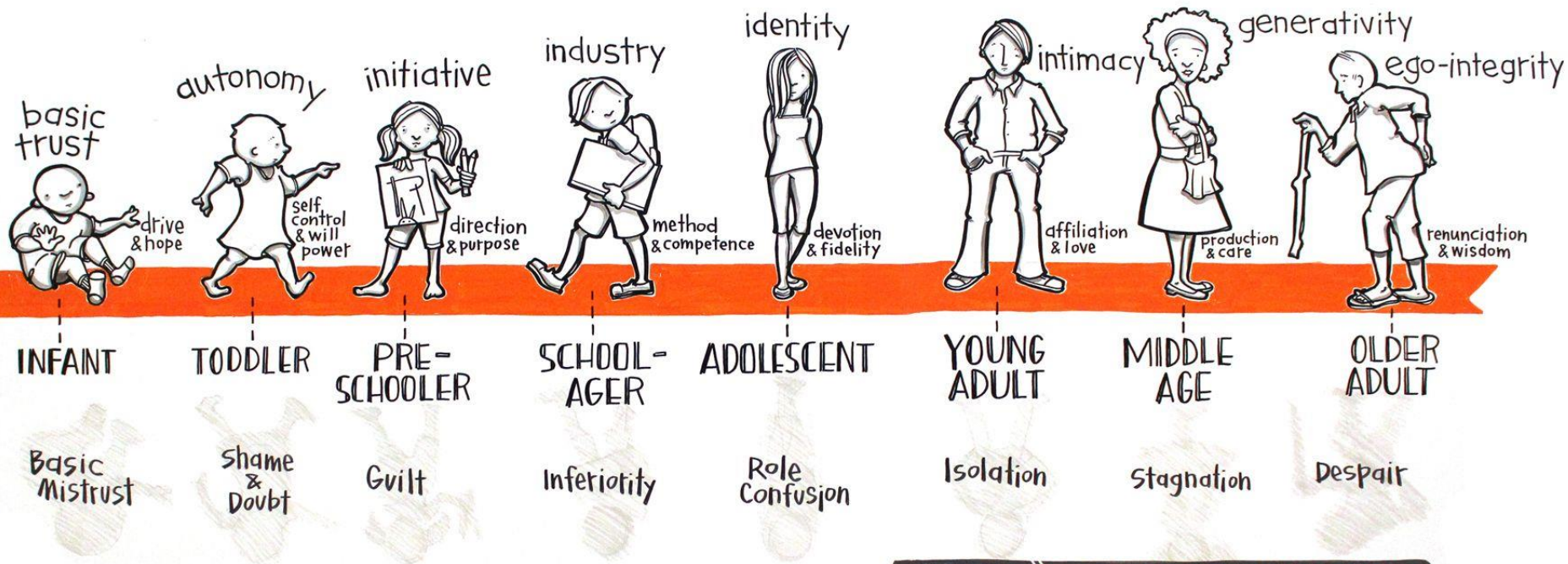
- First task: Identity formation
 - (Connecting with yourself)

“I’m going to figure myself out”

Developmental factors - Psychology

Models: Erikson

- Erikson – “Psychosocial crises”



ERIK H. ERIKSON

STAGES of PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Developmental factors - Psychology

Models: Erikson

- Adolescence: Identity vs. Role Confusion
 - “Trying on” different identities and defining themselves
 - How did you define yourself?
 - “I am...”
 - “I want to be...”
 - Or, what was on your bedroom wall?

Developmental factors - Social

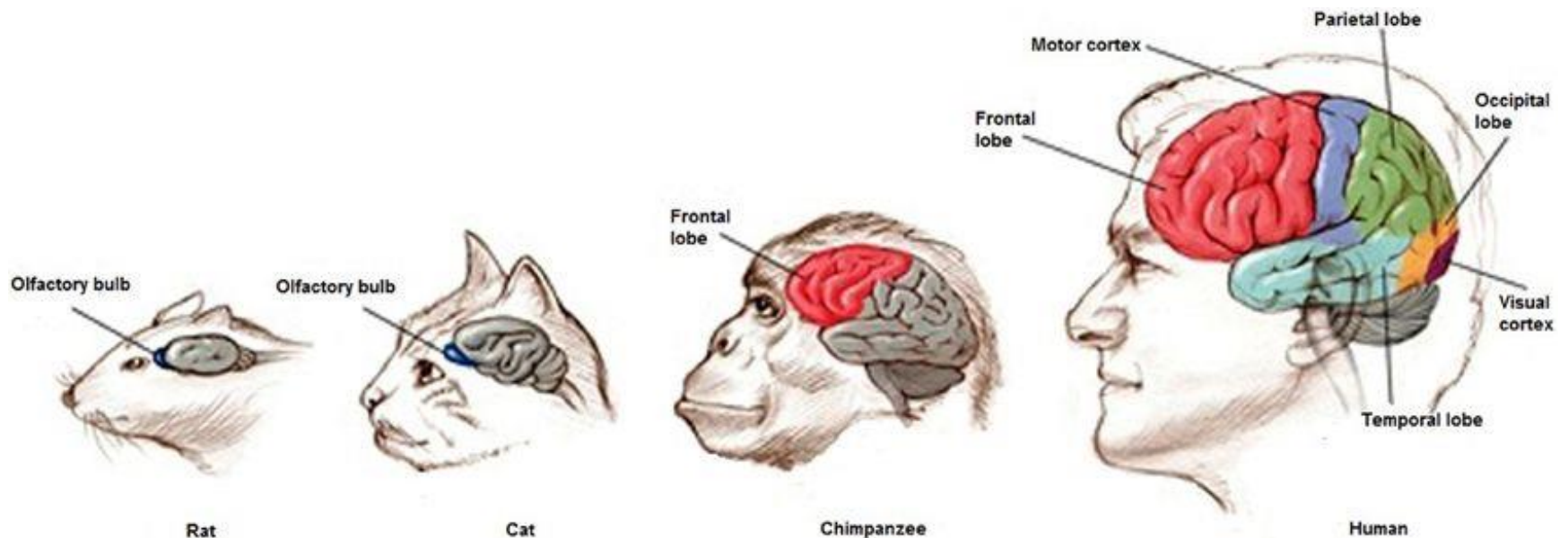
Two major developmental tasks of adolescence

- Second task: Establishing relationships
 - (Connecting with others)

“Finding a tribe”

Developmental factors - Social

Social brain hypothesis



Developmental factors - Social

Role of friendships and romantic relationships

- Cortisol studies by Jim Coan
- Social isolation found to be as big a health risk as smoking

Developmental factors - Social

Is any of this new?

- No!

The questions are old and well-studied, but there are more opportunities to explore with the Internet and social media.

Developmental factors - Social

Is any of this new?

- Common developmental tasks:
 - Look for places to spend time with like-minded people **online**
 - Relaxing **online**
 - Escaping **online**
 - Having fun **online**
 - Learning about themselves and the world **online**

Developmental factors - Social

Are we still “finding a tribe?”

- Yes – we just have more access to tribes and they are significantly more specialized.

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

Social media – what do we know?

- Ironically, because of social media, we can find viral articles promoting fear of social media
 - Twenge, 2017

The Atlantic



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.



Research on risks/benefits of social media use

Twenge article

- 2012 as a pivotal moment in American cultural history
- Trends that sound concerning – increases in anxiety, depression, and loneliness
- Decreased frequency of going through normative rights of passage
 - Getting a driver's license, dating, hanging out away from home

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

Twenge article

- “All screen activities are linked to less happiness and all nonscreen activities are linked to more happiness.”

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

Be skeptical of blanket statements

- How to scare with statistics – find correlations (everything is linked to everything) and draw causal conclusions
- Many pressures reported by kids are consistent with normative developmental concerns (depression, anxiety, loneliness) – this is NOT new.

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

Interpreting correlations

- Churches and crime rate
- Eating ice cream and incidence of drowning



Research on risks/benefits of social media use

New technology = new worries?

- It is easy to see technology as a negative – you are not the first person to worry about it.
- Who identifies with these quotes?

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

New technology = new worries?

- “Widespread internet use is creating an easily distracted generation with short attention spans.”
- “Today’s students have fundamentally different cognitive skills because of the technologies they have grown up with.”
- “This produces distraction and forgetfulness. They aren’t practicing using their [brains], and their trust in this thing, which they are not part of, will discourage the use of their own memory.”

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

What does teen use of social media show us?

- Gardner and Davis (2014)
 - We become risk-averse (our own impression management)
 - Narcissism?
 - Social media gets in the way and separates us

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

What does teen use of social media show us?

- Danah Boyd (2014)
 - Book: *It's Complicated*
 - Spoke directly to kids, not as abstracted.

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

What does teen use of social media show us?

- How many of them use social media/the internet?
 - 95% of American adolescents (between 12 and 17 years old) surf the internet.
- What are they doing?
 - Primarily interacting privately with people they already know

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

What does teen use of social media show us?

- What are they doing?
 - Email, instant messaging, texting
 - Seeking entertainment
 - Seeking information that interests them
 - Avoiding boredom (more on that later)

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

What does teen use of social media show us?

- Why are they doing these things? Per Boyd:
 - Kids are desperate to connect, and use the internet to do so when they can't in person.
 - “They are not addicted to their phones, they are addicted to each other.”

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

What does teen use of social media show us?

- Risks:
 - Anonymity (freedom to do/say things they might not otherwise do)
 - Adopt pre-packaged identities
 - Avoid taking risks
 - Foster a concern about impressions

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

What does teen use of social media show us?

- Risks:
 - Becoming “digitally naïve” (*that* rather than *how* things work – can they detect stage-managed posts?)
 - “Intellectual uncuriousness”
 - Passive social media use (not engaging in direct exchanges – “Facebook effect”)

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

What does teen use of social media show us?

- Benefits:
 - Develop close and meaningful relationships
 - Explore their identity
 - Explore their sexuality
 - Explore intimacy
 - Find information about developmentally sensitive issues

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

What does teen use of social media show us?

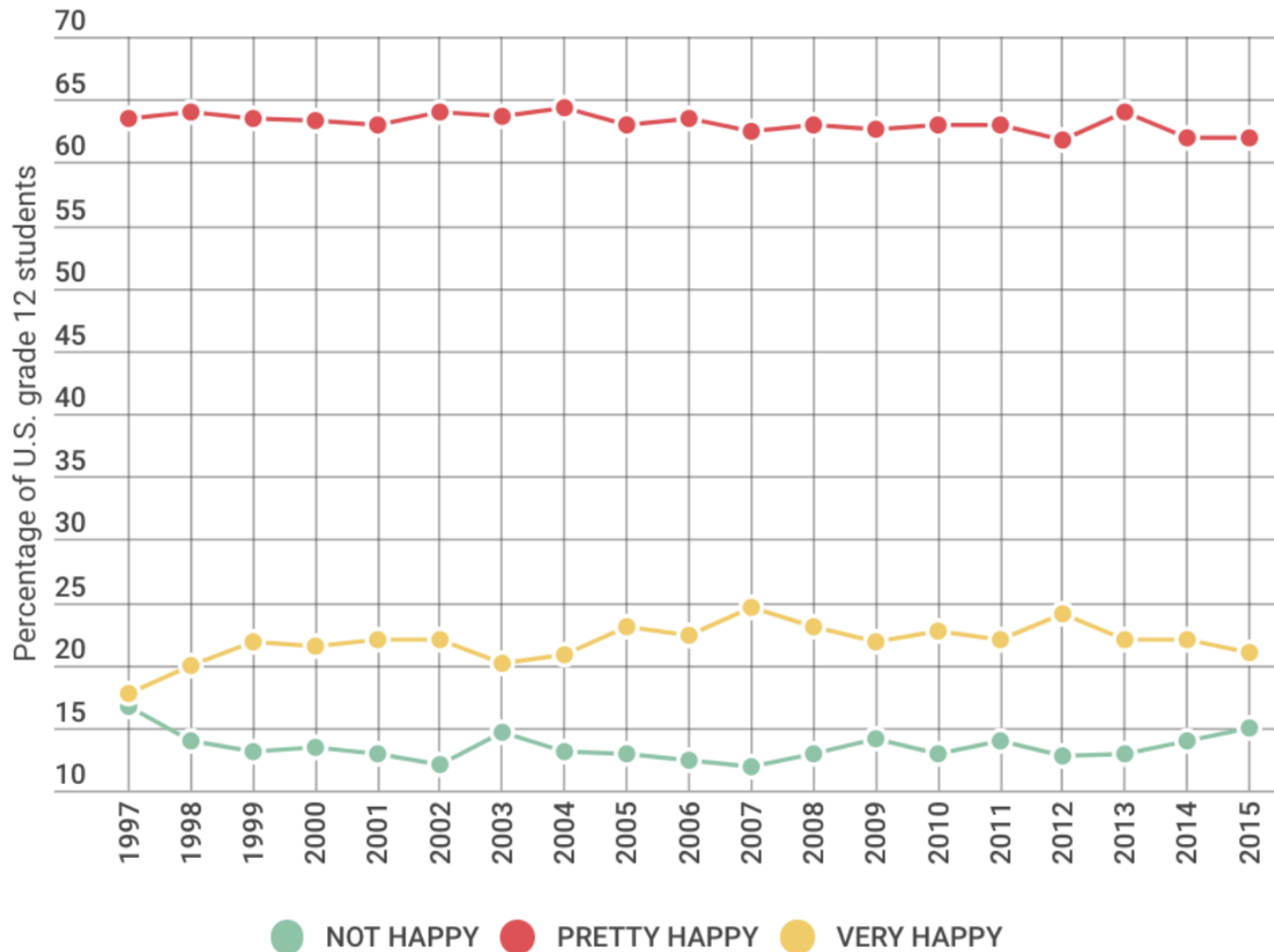
- Benefits:
 - Find academic support
 - Strengthen communication skills
 - Gain feelings of mastery and competence
 - Learn about communication norms and cultures from peers
 - Increase their feeling of connection and sense of community

Research on risks/benefits of social media use

What does teen use of social media show us?

- Given that we are wired to seek others out, this makes sense.
- Kids are on a trajectory to leave their families and head out into the world, and they need support from one another to do it.
- So, what's the take-home message?

Twenty years of data shows no teen happiness crisis



Source: Monitoring the Future grade 12 surveys.

Managing social media use

How do we understand it?

- Nothing fast and nothing easy – there's no magic wand!
- After their peers, parents and teachers have the most influence on kids and teens, and modeling is hard.
- Social media use/connectivity is pervasive – has anyone checked their phone yet, or wanted to?

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- Hard to break habits, as social media use is both positively and negatively reinforced.
- Start being curious, rather than pathologizing

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- We need to become conversant and stay updated with current social media
 - I am really bad at this.
- Let kids and teens take on the role of teacher
 - Be not afraid, either of asking (rejection) or of uncertainty (fear of your agenda)!

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- Let kids and teens take on the role of teacher
 - Be honest and humble about what you don't know
 - “I read about Snapchat streaks, but I don't get it. Can you show me?”
 - “What do your friends do together when you can't be in the same room?”

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- Educating yourself, involving yourself, expressing interest and connecting with them
- What about restricting access?
 - This results in isolation and stress, which they are using the internet and social media to reduce
 - They shouldn't have free rein, we need to be their frontal lobes for a while longer...

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- They understand what the programs are called, what the current usage/fads are, and how to reach one another

BUT...

- They DO NOT understand how to interpret things yet.
 - Being in an interconnected network of people doesn't teach us how to discriminate about what we see.

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- “Facebook effect” – is what appears on social media designed to provoke a particular response/promote a particular image?
- Kids need to be educated about factors like
 - Context
 - Author
 - Intended audience

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- This isn't just for consumption of social media, but production as well
 - “Context collapse” in the social media age – intended vs actual audience, and that mistakes can last for a very long time.

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- Limits on phone use that support values:
 - Sleep
 - Sleep hygiene and phones as a wakeful activity
 - Curfew for phones of, ideally, 90 minutes before bed
 - Old-fashioned alarm clocks

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- Limits on phone use that support values:
 - One another
 - Learning about/from and active engagement
 - Family dinners
 - Better academic performance
 - Higher self-esteem
 - Lower risk of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, eating disorders, and obesity

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- Limits on phone use that support values:
 - Well-rounded development
 - This takes time – limiting to 90 minutes per weekday and 2 hours per day on the weekend
 - Developing a wealth of hobbies and interests through boredom
 - Critical thinking, connections with others

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- Limits on phone use that support values:
 - Well-rounded development
 - Contributing to the community, individually or programmatically
 - Unofficial jobs – babysitting, yard work, cleaning houses

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- Limits on phone availability/functionality
 - “Wait until 8th” movement
 - It takes until about 8th grade for kids to develop necessary socio-emotional and executive functioning skills, and for parents/educators to teach them.
 - Every major carrier makes phones with calls/texts only.

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- Direct monitoring
 - On a continuum – check-ins vs. apps
 - Controversial – is it parental surveillance?
 - Kids' capacity to make choices
- As I have said before, kids don't come on the scene with their frontal lobes developed, so some monitoring is warranted.

Managing social media use

Strategies?

- Direct monitoring
 - But... we need to approach it carefully and respectfully.
 - Two principles:
 - Be transparent (it's futile not to)
 - Back it up

Managing social media use

Two principles:

- Be transparent
 - You will get caught, they're better than you at this
 - Several risks to this breach of trust – compromising your relationship deprives teens of a critical protective factor
 - You are modeling sneaky behavior
 - They'll just get better at hiding it from you

Managing social media use

Two principles:

- Back it up
 - That is, justify why you're doing this
 - (Taking from Lisa Damour's book, *Untangled*)
 - Approach from a place of wanting to connect.

Managing social media use

Two principles:

- Back it up
 - “By having these accounts, you’re available to a whole world of people, and I want to be part of that world.”
 - “I would be interested in *anything* you were doing for 90 minutes a day.”
 - “I pay for it.”

Managing social media use

What are we looking for when monitoring?

- Sharing something they/you would not want to be part of their permanent record
- Bullying or being bullied
- Attempts to regulate emotions online
 - Fights with friends or significant others, anything you would consider “intense drama”
 - “Vaguebooking”

Managing social media use

What are we looking for when monitoring?

- Vaguebooking
 - “An intentionally vague status update which prompts friends to ask what is going on, or possibly a cry for help”
 - Ex:
 - “Thinking that was a bad idea.”
 - “Wondering if it is all worth it.”
 - NOT “Standing in line at the grocery store.”

Managing social media use

What are we looking for when monitoring?

- Vaguebooking
 - This type of social media use, by kids/teens/their friends can serve as prompts for further conversations
 - Privacy, kindness, friendship-building



Managing social media use

How much is enough?

- It is appropriate to phase out any monitoring after kids have shown that they can use social media in positive, prosocial ways



Managing social media use

It all starts with you

- The research clearly shows that the best way for kids to get a handle on how and when to use, and how to interpret, social media, is through adult modeling.
 - You will feel better, too!



Thank you!

Any questions?

