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TEEN & PARENT WELLNESS CENTERS

Cell Phones, Online Safety, & Teen Mental Health

Presented by:
Melyssa Zive, LCSW - ROWI Teen & Parent Wellness Centers
Special Agent Victoria Scott - Homeland Security Investigations (HSI)



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Introduction

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Melyssa Zive, LCSW
Director of Clinical Operations,
ROWI Teen & Parent Wellness Centers

Special Agent Victoria Scott
Homeland Security Investigations, Northridge Division

About the Speaker: Melyssa Zive, LCSW

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Melyssa Zive is a Licenced Clinical Social Worker with 18 years of experience working with children, adolescents and their families. Melyssa has worked in schools, private practice and higher level of care settings. She has a passion for working with families and has a specialty in Autism Spectrum Disorders.

In her current role, Melyssa serves as Director of Clinical Operations for **ROWI**. Additionally, she spearheaded the **ROWI KIDS** program that is now established in Tustin and Encino.

Bird's Eye View

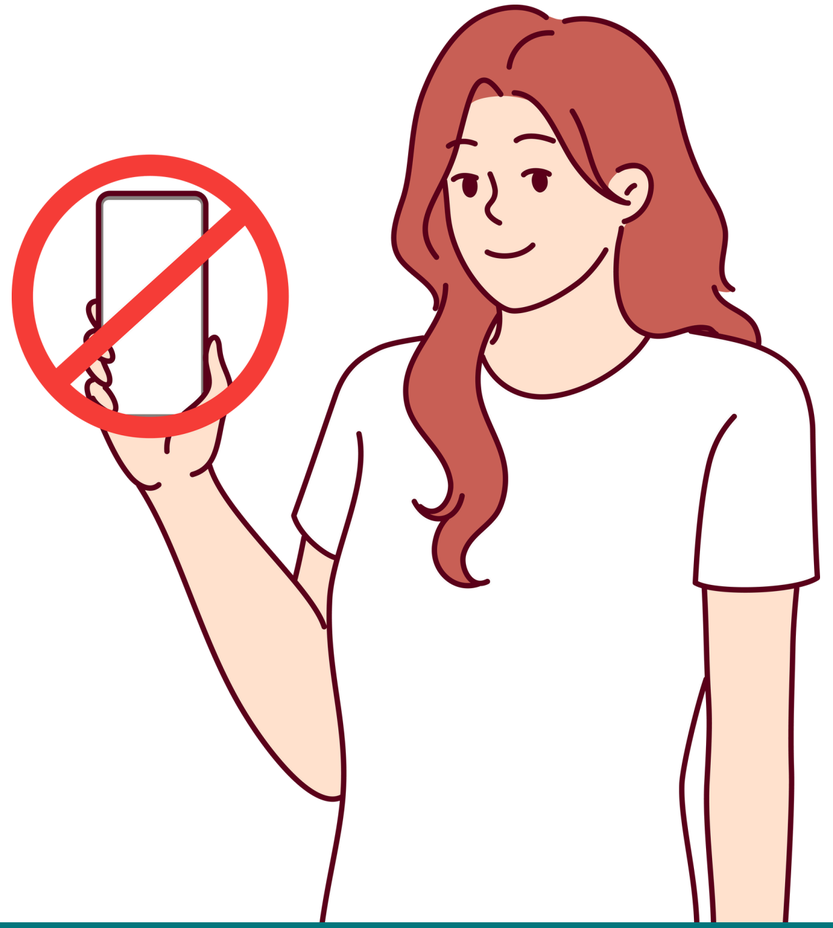
- **95% of teens** have access to a smartphone. *(Source: Pew Research Center, 2023)*
- Average daily screen time is **7-9 hours** for **ages 11-17**.



Changes in California

- Assembly Bill 3216 (Phone-Free Schools Act) mandates all school districts to adopt policies limiting or prohibiting student smartphone use by July 1, 2026, aiming to improve mental health and focus.

- Oak Park Unified School District has worked diligently to develop BP 5131.8, which clearly delineates allowable mobile communication device use for elementary, middle, and high school students.



Why are Schools Taking Action?

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Research links excessive phone use to:

- Decreased academic performance
- Cyberbullying
- Fear of missing out (FOMO)
- Increased depression and anxiety
- Disrupted sleep cycles



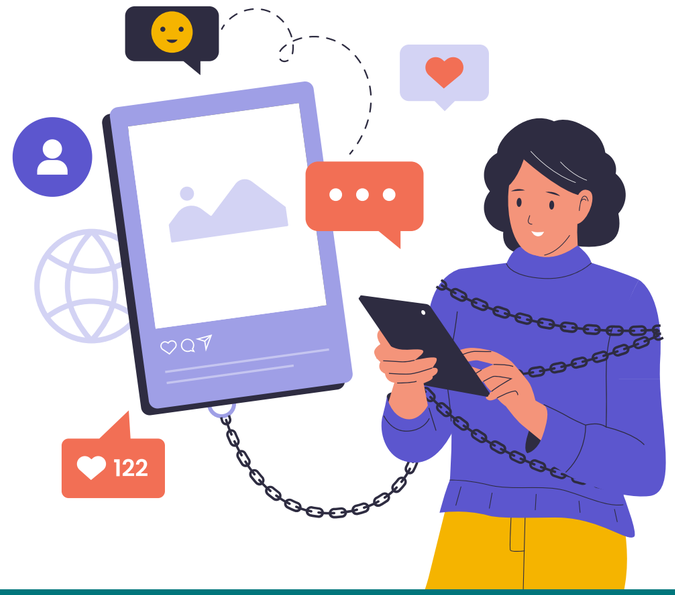
Data

Teens who spend more than 3 hours per day on devices are:

- **60% more likely** to report depression.
- **2x the risk** of poor sleep.

The average student checks their phone every 4-6 minutes.

- **1 in 3 teens** report feeling “addicted” to their phone.
- Large scale studies have shown that excessive exposure to irrelevant material on the Internet causes cognitive malfunctions in the brain.



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Digital Use and Mental Health

Digital Use and Mental Health

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Digital overuse is linked to:

- Lower self esteem
- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Slow learning and acquisition time
- Impaired concentration
- Reduced face-to-face interactions
- Heightened stress response in the brain



Digital Use and Mental Health

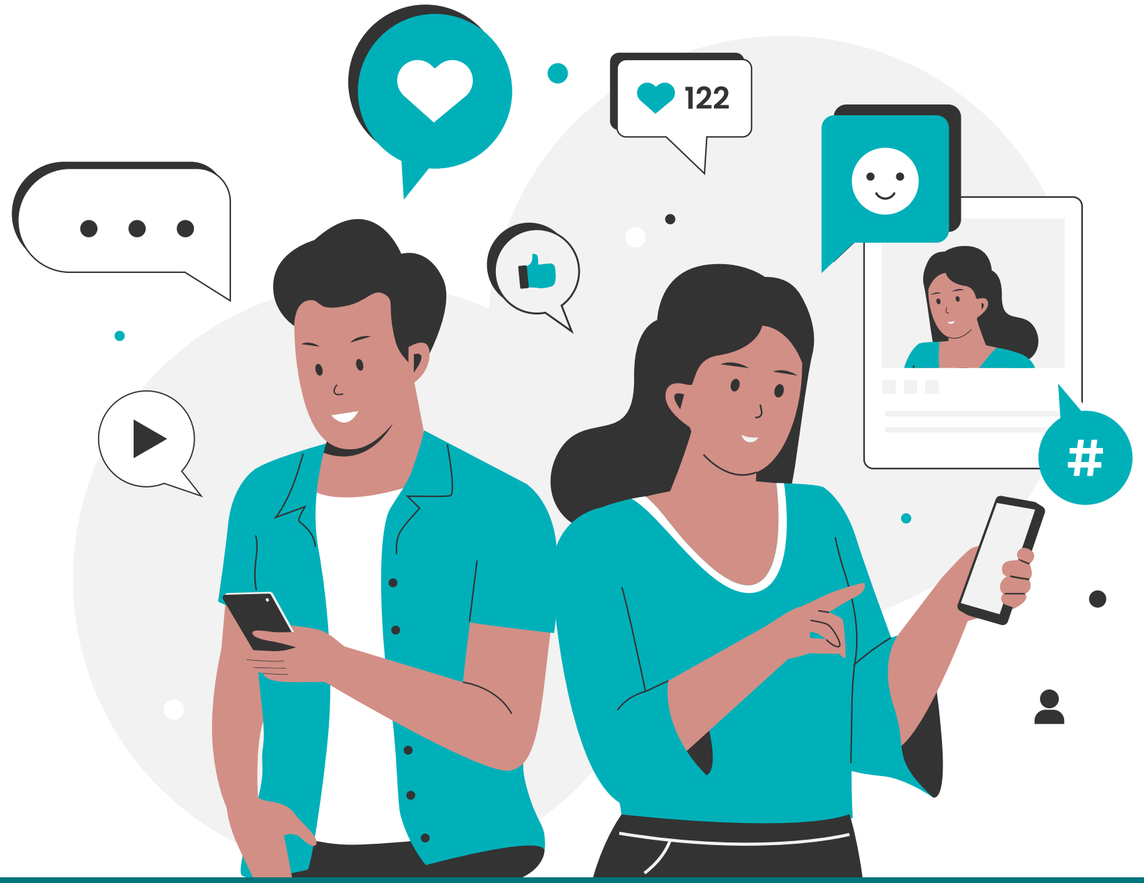
- **Popcorn Brain:** term coined by professor David Levy describing a scattered thought pattern that happens due to constant dopamine spikes. It involves a lack of control of thoughts.

- **Brain Rot:** was named the Oxford Word of the Year in 2024. The term refers to the cognitive decline and metal exhaustion experienced by individuals due to excessive exposure to low-quality online material, especially social media. *(Source: Demystifying the New Dilemma of Brain Rot in the Digital Era: A Review)*



Social Media

- Social media platforms are built to keep teens' attention.
- "Highlight reels" fuel comparison which increases anxiety.



Benefits of Limiting Use

- Improved focus and learning
- Healthier peer relationships
- Vital social skills for the workforce
- Better sleep hygiene
- Reduced anxiety and stress
- Stronger resilience and coping skills



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What Can Parents and Guardians Do?

What Can Parents/Guardians Do?

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1. *Set Clear Expectations:*

- Explain the school rules and why they exist.
- Collaborate on a family phone policy.



2. *Model Balanced Use:*

- Put your own phone away during meals and conversations.

3. *Encourage Device-Free Time:*

- Tech-free zones in the bedroom and at the dining table.
- Use phone baskets during homework time.

What Can Parents/Guardians Do?

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4. *Normalize Boredom:*

- Teens do **not** need to be entertained or stimulated all the time.
- Boredom = Creativity

5. *Talk About Feelings:*

- Normalize discussing anxiety from social media.
- Validate their struggles and/or feelings regarding limiting device time.

6. *Focus on Sleep:*

- No phones **an hour before bed.**



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How to Create a Family Media Management Plan:

With Guidance by the American Academy of Pediatrics

Creating a Family Media Management Plan

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1. *Screen-Free Zones:*

- Where can you use devices in your home? Where are they **not** allowed?
- Will devices be allowed in bedrooms overnight?



2. *Screen-Free Times:*

- Consider implementing **no screens** during mealtime.
- Can you use your phone while in the car?
- Find screen-free times throughout the day to connect, such as on the way to or heading home from school.
- It is also important to have screen-free time **1 hour before** going to sleep.

3. *Device Curfews:*

- What time must devices be turned off at night?
- In which room will devices be charged overnight?

Creating a Family Media Management Plan

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4. *Choose and Diversify Your Media:*



- What types of media will your family use? (Phone, PC, gaming consoles, television, etc.)
- How much of permitted media time will be spent on educational media vs. recreational media vs. game-play?
    - *Work with your child in labeling each activity and what category they fall under. Make sure you view all of the sites being discussed.*
- How much time will be spent using media together vs. solo media time?
    - *Engage with your child and ask questions about the media they engage in. Research says engaging in media activities with your child endorses a healthy relationship with media and enhances the parent/child relationship. Engaging in shared learning opens conversations and builds trust.*

Creating a Family Media Management Plan

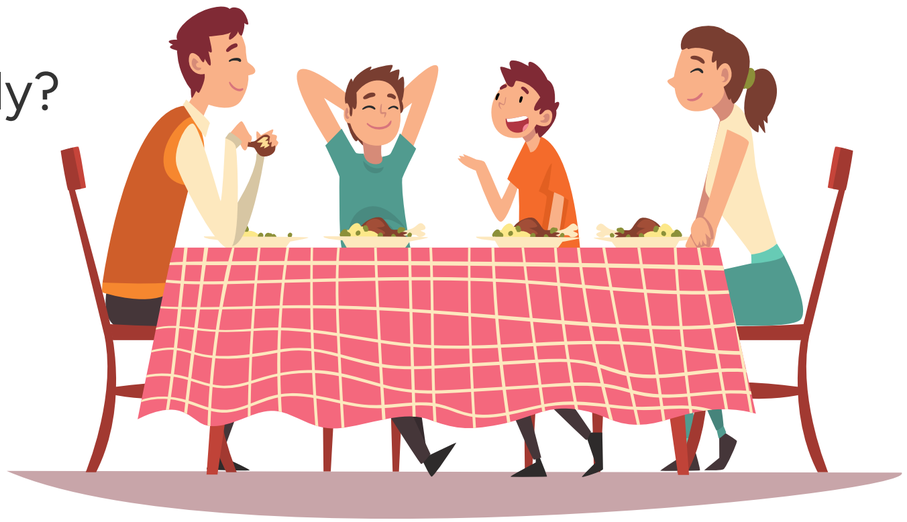
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5. *Balancing Online and Offline Time:*

- What non-screen time activities will your family enjoy together?
- What other hobbies can your child pursue independently?
- What activities can your child engage in with friends when **not** using media?

6. *Manners Matter:*

- What etiquette rules will apply to media use in your family?
- Can you answer a text while in a conversation with someone else?
- Can devices be on the table during dinner?
- Can your child use a device during a family outing, and what qualifies as a family outing, i.e. car rides?



Creating a Family Media Management Plan

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7. *Digital Citizenship:*

- How will your family respond to online bullying?
- How can you respect the privacy of others online?
- What type of language is expected when using media?
    - *It is important to let your child know that monitoring checks will occur in order to ensure appropriate media behavior.*
    - *Be clear about what is expected behavior online. Do **not** assume your child knows.*



Creating a Family Media Management Plan

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8. *Safety First:*

- What types of information are safe to share online?
- What types of online activities will your child need your permission or supervision?
- What should your child do if they receive messages that make them uncomfortable?
    - *Remind your child that **nothing** online is truly private.*
    - *It is important to think "would I want my first employer to see this?" before posting.*

9. *Sleep and Exercise:*

- How will your family members ensure that they get enough sleep?
- How can each of your family members make sure they engage in **one hour** of physical activity **every day?**



Tips for Teens

- Use “Do Not Disturb” mode when you are in focus time.
- Turn off non-essential notifications.
- Charge devices outside of your bedroom.
- Try a screen time tracking app for accountability.
- Replace scrolling with a hobby or movement break.



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Online Safety

About the Guest:
Special Agent Victoria Scott



Special Agent Victoria Scott is a federal law enforcement officer working crimes against children here in Los Angeles, among other public safety threats, and works frequently with parents and community members to educate about online safety and social media awareness. Before her 10 years in law enforcement, she taught 5th through 8th grade in Arizona where she received her Bachelor's and Master's Degrees at the University of Arizona.

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CONTENT WARNING

Contains references to sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

Monster PSA Childfund International:
Video Spotlight



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmb9OEo_UvU

Tips2Protect: Know the Threats

- Technology is the modern playground. Predators go where kids go.
- Know who your child communicates with online.
- Monitor friend lists regularly and remove strangers.
- Do the research – familiarize yourself with games and apps your child uses.



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Tips2Protect: How Exploitation Happens

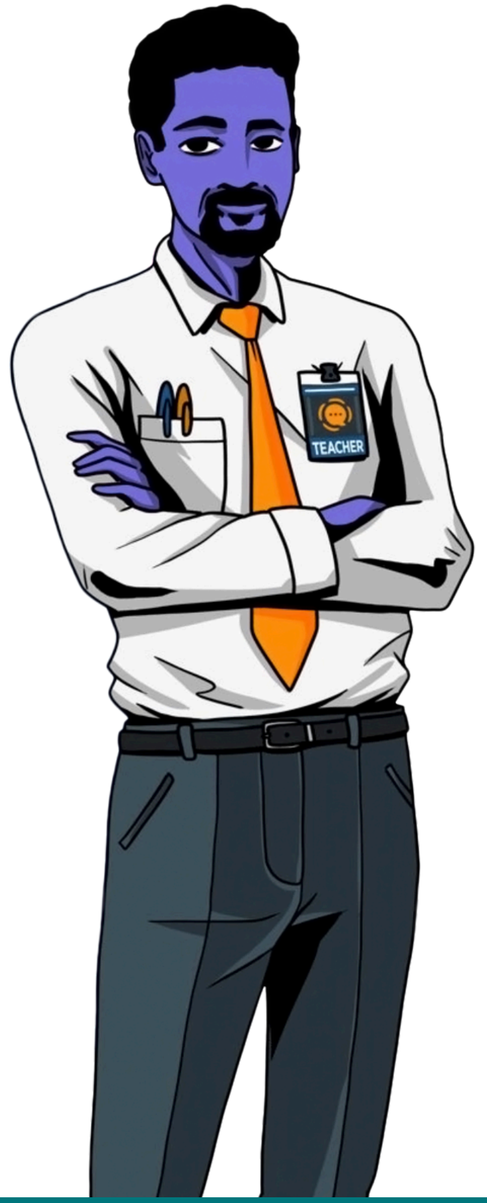
- Communicate grooming tactics with your child.
- Any app, social media platform, or game that has a communication feature is a vulnerability.
- Teach your child the dangers of moving the conversation off-platform or physically meeting offline.



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Tips2Protect: Personal Information and Data Permanency

- Turn location features off on all social media, games, and camera apps.
- Communicate the permanency of **all** online data to your child.
- Create clear expectations for what is appropriate to post and start sharing at early ages.



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Tips2Protect: Sexting and Sextortion

- Teach that once a photo, video, or text leaves a device, your child loses control of that data.
- If sextortion occurs, stop communication, block accounts, and save evidence.
- Stop sextortion by teaching your child to communicate with trusted adults and law enforcement.



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Tips2Protect: If It Happens To Your Child

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- Be calm – young children and teens **are victims** in these situations.
- Create a caring environment where your child feels safe to talk to you.
- Stop communication with the offender, block accounts, and save evidence.
- Contact the right authorities and the platform.



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Resources | Q&A

Resources

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Books:

- *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt
- *Irresistible* by Adam Alter
- *Digital Minimalist* by Cal Newport
- *IGen* by Jean Twenge

Websites:

- Common Sense Media - commonsensemedia.org
- Wait Until 8th Campaign - waituntil8th.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics Media Plan Tool - aap.org [type “Media Plan” into search]



Resources

NCMEC Missing Kids - www.missingkids.org

- For information on available services for victims and family members, contact the National Center for Mission & Exploited Children (NCMEC).

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - www.988lifeline.org

- If you are thinking of suicide or need emotional support, help is always available by phone or text at **988** or call **911**

Take It Down - www.takeitdown.ncmec.org

- Take It Down is a free service that can help. you remove or stop the online sharing of nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit images/videos taken of you.



Resources

Know 2 Protect - www.know2protect.gov

- Created to educate and empower children, teens, parents, trusted adults and policymakers to prevent and combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA).

HSI Tipline - 1 (866) 347-2423

Bark Parental Monitoring - www.bark.us

iGuardian Presentations

- HSI offers three different presentations for ages 10 and up. To request a presentation, email the Project Guardian team at iGuardian.hq@hsi.dhs.gov

