Youth Online: A positive approach to smart use

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Presented March 16, 2011 at the Disability Fair in Portland, Oregon.
The Overwhelming Majority of Young Adults Use the Internet

- Among young adults, ages 18-29
  - 93% go online
  - 72% use social networking
  - 72% looked for health information online
    - 33% looked up information about mental health

Why Go Online?

- To look up information
- To connect with people
- To create
Looking Up Information

- **People Use the Internet to Guide Their Health Decisions**
  - “Every day, more people go online for medical advice than actually visit health care professionals”

- 18% of adults have gone online to diagnose or treat a medical condition on their own, without consulting their doctor

- About half of online adult online health information seekers have read someone else's commentary or experience about health or medical issues
  - We think these numbers are higher for young adults specifically
Topics Young Adults Look Up:

- Medications
- Diagnosis
- Treatment Options
- Insurance/Access to health care
- Transition support/resources (e.g., coping skills, food stamps)
Looking Up Information

- Why do they look up information online?
  - Finding out more: Looking up terms or something else not understood from another source/ Challenging/confirming information heard elsewhere
  - Community: Opinions/POVs/personal experience
  - Nowhere else to go: lack of insurance
  - To prepare for a health visit
  - Anonymity
Things to Consider

- The quality of online information

Know Your ABCs!

- Author/Authority
- Business Model (URL designation)
- Current information?
- Sources

- Look for quality seals of approval/sites you can trust
Connecting with People

- Social networking: Facebook, MySpace, Twitter...
- Concern: relationships with “virtual acquaintances” can’t reach the same level of closeness as actual friendships, and lack the mutual feedback, support, and sense of security of more traditional relationships
- Research: social networking, including participation in chat rooms and blogging, may improve social connectedness, decrease isolation, and enhance subjective well-being through the practice of mutual feedback and self-disclosure
85% of teens have friends they talk to in person, but never online.

36% of teens have friends they talk to online, but never met in person.
  • 66% are “not at all” or “somewhat” close to these people

87% of teens have friends that they know in person and also talk to online.

Trends and Tudes, 2006
NAMI asked: “Does a social networking site help transition-aged youth feel less isolated?”

- 94% said “yes”
- *I trust the people who I have met who have had similar experiences. I had never met anyone who was bipolar before I met them on the internet and they told me their experiences personally.*
Youth who develop close online relationships are:
- More likely to be depressed
- Have higher levels of conflict with parents
- Less likely to communicate with parents

Troubled youth are:
- more likely to have an online romance
- less likely to tell parent about meeting an online friend in person
- more likely to say that the person they met did not look as expected

Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003
57% of teens create online content (Pew, 2005).
- 22% have their own web page

52% of blogs are managed by 13-19 year olds (Perseus Dev.Corp, 2003).
- Young adults with a mental health condition more likely to do this than those who do report having a mental health conditions (31% vs 2%)

Teens create “positive” content online
- Share stories
- Support groups
- Outreach
Concerns:

- Over-disclosure
  - Stigmatization
  - Sexting

- Cyberbullying
  - Vulnerability
  - Perpetrator and/or recipient?
Important Lessons

- **Searchability** – *Anyone* (friend or foe) can find it.

- **Persistence** – Things posted online can be there forever unless someone actively takes it down from *all* locations (see “Replicability”).

- **Replicability** – Any information found online can be shared/copied - in emails, IMs, profiles, via file-sharing networks, etc.
  - **Legal issues**

- **Invisible audience** - you don't know who you're sharing your information with, even if your page is private, because you don’t know who has “borrowed” it (see “Replicability”).
  - **Stigmatization**

*Adapted from Danah Boyd, http://www.alternet.org/story/46766*
Each person experiences media differently
- Different people are going to react to your content differently.
- Getting youth to step out of their shoes and into other roles.

Media are constructions of reality, not reality
- How do you represent yourself online?
  - Popularity
Important Lessons

- Talk about the internet as a public/private space.
- Think of social networking as “hanging out.”
- Many of the lessons on proper internet use reflect the lessons we teach youth about how to treat each other and themselves offline
  - Respect
  - Consideration for others
  - Safety
The development of the contents of this presentation were supported by funding from the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research, United States Department of Education, and the Center for Mental Health Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services (NIDRR grant H133B090019). The content does not represent the views or policies of the funding agencies. In addition, you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.