

# Media in the family

## ● Excessive media use



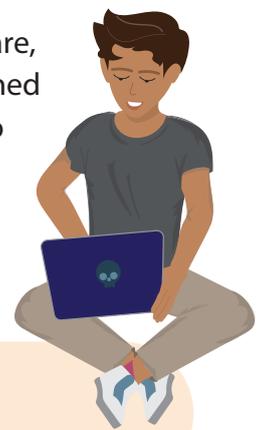
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# Excessive media use and digital stress

## Everyday use of media by children and young people

Digital offerings – especially social media and digital games – fascinate children and young people. Above all, however, they satisfy numerous needs: showing who you are, creating and uploading your own content, taking part in something, being entertained and informed. There are many reasons why digital offerings are used so often and so readily, and these are frequently interrelated or interdependent:



### Older children and young people want to ...

... **belong**. Social contacts such as friends are important to them.

... **set themselves apart from their parents** and lead their own lives.

... **be autonomous and independent**.

... feel **accepted by their peers**. They are seeking orientation and order.

### Digital offerings provide ...

... **a chance to interact with people of the same age**. You can network when everyone is online.

... **entertainment, relaxation** and the opportunity to switch off, e.g. immerse yourself in other topics or worlds.

the chance to **(re)invent yourself**, e.g. show who you are on your own profile or slip into another role.

... a **positive feeling** when you feel you are accepted, e.g. via likes and comments or rewards in games.

### Can media cause stress?

Media are part of everyday life and are fun – but they can also cause stress. Being confronted with unrealistic beauty ideals, cyberbullying, hate messages, misinformation and other problematic content on social media can generate negative feelings and stress, especially among young users.

What's more, digital devices such as smartphones and smartwatches attract attention in many everyday situations by emitting sounds and tempting people to interrupt their current activity, for instance to read a message or view a social media post. Having constant access to information and being available anytime and anywhere can be overwhelming and cause stress, for instance when you are waiting for messages from others or because you put yourself under pressure to respond to messages quickly. Social media channels with lots of posts, or busy group chats with hundreds of messages sometimes sent every day can also give you the feeling of not being able to keep up with reading everything sent. Children and young people can be afraid of missing out or of being excluded if they fail to respond to posts or messages immediately. <sup>[1]</sup> The fear of missing something if you are not constantly online is also known as FOMO (fear of missing out). Watch the video "What is FOMO?" to find out more about the phenomenon.



Video  
"What is FOMO?"

🌐 To the explanatory video



The pressure to constantly be online is also intensified by the sites themselves: almost all current social media sites (such as TikTok and Instagram) do their utmost to attract the attention of users in order to get them to spend more time there than they originally planned. They try to achieve this in several ways, including via algorithms that display thematically relevant posts and through hidden manipulative mechanisms (so-called “dark patterns”) that increase the time spent on websites. This can create a kind of pull that makes it difficult for users to quit the apps and offerings.

### Is my child’s media use excessive?

Media use causes regular arguments between parents and children, especially when it comes to how long children use media. Some young people play computer games intensively, sit in front of the TV for lengthy periods or are almost constantly on their smartphone. In the majority of cases, their use regulates itself over time. Just because children and young people play a lot or use media more over a certain period of time, for instance when they discover a new social media offering or game, parents don’t have to worry right away. The FAQ video “Media in the family – Excessive media use” contains answers to questions frequently asked by parents, as well as additional tips on the topic.



FAQ video “Media in the family – Excessive media use”

🎧 To the FAQ video



## When should parents intervene?

It becomes problematic when media are used very frequently and for a very long time in conjunction with the occurrence of other factors, such as



- a decline in school performance,
- other leisure activities being entirely superseded by media use or hobbies being given up,
- friendships being neglected,
- family life suffering as a result (e.g. constant arguments about media use),
- media being used to avoid everyday problems (e.g. difficulties at school or with friends),
- a mental and physical change in a child or young person (e.g. lack of concentration, poor performance, lack of exercise and obesity).



### Tips for dealing with excessive media use

As a rule, blanket bans do little to prevent problems associated with media use. Instead, children and young people should learn to control their own media use in the long term. The following tips can provide support.

#### Agree rules together

It can be helpful to agree on fixed rules for media use in your family. Involve all members of the family and work together to find a solution that everyone agrees on. For instance, you can draw up a contract for media use that everyone signs:

 [www.mediennutzungsvertrag.de](http://www.mediennutzungsvertrag.de)

#### Take a stand

What is allowed in other families does not necessarily apply to yours. Listen to your gut instinct: can your child use media responsibly without other things such as schoolwork or family life suffering as a result? If necessary, consider how you can support your child so that other things besides media use are not neglected.

#### Make use of technical safeguards

If your child finds it difficult to keep track of their own usage time, using technical settings can help. On most devices, the “Screen time” function can be used to set restrictions on usage time and apps and prescribe rest periods.

**Tip:** the online portal **Medien kindersicher** offers step-by-step instructions for specific security settings for various devices, operating systems, services and apps:

 [www.medien-kindersicher.de](http://www.medien-kindersicher.de)

#### Act as a role model

Try to pay attention to when you use which media yourself and for how long. Your behavior sets an example to your child. Just because the smartphone is easily accessible doesn't mean that leisure time has to be spent exclusively on it.

#### Remain alert and set boundaries

Pay attention to changes in your child relating to school performance, contact with friends, other duties or behavior as a result of their media use. You can try to talk to them, but don't criticize – children and young people often don't regard their behavior as problematic themselves. Make your position clear and, if necessary, set limits.

### Search for causes and offer diversions

What could be the reason for your child's increased media use? Is something missing in their everyday life? What needs is your child trying to satisfy? Might your child have worries or problems and how can you help? Have a go at talking to them – encourage them to take up other hobbies or leisure activities again or to try something new.

### Seek help

If you notice that your child is already displaying addictive behavior when using media, you can seek professional help. Support is offered by addiction and family counseling centers, among other organizations. It can also be helpful to talk to other parents in a similar situation.

# Use of digital games and online gaming addiction

For most children and young people, digital games are an integral part of the everyday media experience. Smartphone games remain a particularly popular pastime, with 53% of respondents using them regularly. Console games and computer games are both regularly played by 28% of 12 to 19-year-olds. The average daily playing time of 12 to 19-year-olds (during the week) is **92 minutes**. On average, boys play for 119 minutes a day – almost twice as long as girls, who play for 61 minutes. In 2023, just 8% of respondents didn't play at all. <sup>[2]</sup>

## Let's Play videos

In addition to playing games themselves, children and young people are particularly fond of watching Let's Play videos. These are game clips featuring user commentary that are published on online video platforms such as YouTube and Twitch. Players film their screen and/or their reactions while commenting on their actions in the game. Viewers can join in the debate by posting comments or are addressed directly in live streams, often making the videos seem very personal. The most popular Let's Players have up to several million subscribers and have attained celebrity status. <sup>[3]</sup>



Digital games fascinate children and young people – and above all, they are fun. However, they also satisfy numerous other needs. The FAQ video “Media in the family – Dealing with digital games” contains answers to questions frequently asked by parents, as well as additional tips on the topic.



FAQ video “Media in the family – Dealing with digital games”

 [To the FAQ video](#)

### Why do children and young people often find it so hard to stop playing?

Some games can be played quickly when you have a couple of minutes to spare, while others require more effort and even teamwork. When it comes to multi-player games, in particular, you don't want to let your teammates down – and so may end up to spending too much time in the game. The same applies to game worlds that continue even when you are offline. What's more, games often contain specific functions that are designed to keep players in the game for as long as possible – for instance, tasks must be completed within a certain time frame in order to earn a reward. All of this encourages you to play a lot and for a long time.

### What is online gaming addiction?

However, the term online gaming addiction is only used if the following criteria apply over at least 12 months or are extremely pronounced:

- **Loss of control:** Players can no longer control when, how often and for how long they play. They feel that they are missing something whenever they aren't playing.
- **Playing is the main activity:** Playing becomes increasingly important. Other activities, hobbies and friends are neglected or even given up entirely. Players can't think about anything but playing.
- **Playing despite negative consequences:** Players continue to play anyway, even though it has negative consequences, such as stress at school, at work or in their relationships.

**Gambling addiction has been listed in the WHO ICD (International Classification of Diseases) catalog as a "gaming disorder" since 2018, meaning that it is now officially classified as a disease. <sup>[4]</sup> Online or media addiction, on the other hand, is not yet listed as a disease in the WHO catalog.**



### Is my child at risk of becoming addicted?

If you have the feeling that your child is playing too much, a series of questions can help you to assess whether there may be a potential risk.

**Bear in mind** that only doctors or therapists can determine whether someone is actually addicted to online games. There are also self-tests online to indicate whether you are addicted to gambling. Not all of them deliver meaningful results. However, some can serve as a point of reference for thinking about your own gaming behavior. There are now also apps that measure daily screen time on smartphones and can provide good feedback. However, anyone who is worried should seek advice from a doctor or therapist.



### Tips for dealing with digital games

When dealing with digital games, it also makes sense to follow the  **Tips for dealing with excessive use** on P. 7 as a guide. For instance, it can be helpful to have fixed rules for the use of games that apply to everyone in the family, because parents are also important role models when it comes to digital games. The following tips can also provide support:

#### Find out about new games

Before making a purchase, research new games that your child likes or would like to play. Some online ratings portals offer extensive information on and reviews and assessments of popular games and game apps. One example is the  **Spieleratgeber NRW**, where you can find out about the storyline of a game, what the aim is, what age a game is suitable for and other aspects to bear in mind. Let's Play videos are another way of previewing and better assessing a game. The videos show gamers filming themselves as they play a game while recounting their experiences and impressions.

### Play together and act as a point of contact

There may be many different reasons why your child plays. Entertainment, relaxation, stress relief – there is nothing wrong with any of these. Try to understand your child’s motives for playing the game. It can help to have your child show and explain the game to you, or even to play it together. This makes for shared experiences and can help you to better understand your child’s preferences and feelings when playing. It can also help your child to come to you and confide in you in the event of problems. By the way, many games require great skill and fast reactions, for example, on your child’s part. They aren’t that easy – so, appreciate your child’s abilities.



### Recognize and avoid risks

Some digital games can be problematic – they depict violence and can be overwhelming. You should ensure that your child plays only games that are appropriate for their age. The age labels of the USK (German entertainment software self-regulation body) on media (e.g. game DVDs) and age ratings on online games and apps can provide guidance here. You can also try out the games yourself beforehand – after all, you know your child best. Parental control PINs or special profiles can also be set up on online gaming platforms to protect children from unsuitable games and content.

Games may contain cost traps and advertising. To avoid cost traps, deactivate “in-app purchases” in the app store and don’t enter any payment details. Arrange with your child that they have to ask you before buying anything in the game. Pay attention to the personal data requested by a game: also agree fixed rules with your child on what they can and cannot say. Many game providers sell the data on to earn money.



# Further information and assistance



The following websites contain German-language links to advice centers and offers of help. Websites can generally be automatically translated into other languages via the browser settings (e.g. in Chrome) or via browser extensions (so-called add-ons). Alternatively, the internet address of the required site can be entered into an online translation program (e.g. Google Translate), which will translate the contents into the desired language.

## Deutsches Zentrum für Suchtfragen des Kindes- und Jugendalters (DZSKJ)

The DZSKJ provides tips and information on therapy and counseling options for computer game addiction, among other things, under 🌐 <https://www.mediensuchthilfe.info/>.

## Fachverband Medienabhängigkeit

The 🌐 **Fachverband Medienabhängigkeit e.V.** offers information for those affected and their relatives and provides an overview of national advice centers and contact points that specialize in the topic of media addiction.

## Juuuport

🌐 **Juuuport** is a nationwide online advice center run by young people for young people. It provides help on various online topics and problems. Teenage and young adult volunteers help their peers with online problems such as cyberbullying, social media stress, data misuse, excessive media use and fake news.

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# Imprint

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Grades 3 and 4: "Schein oder Wirklichkeit? Botschaften in Werbespots analysieren und bewerten" (Fact or fiction? Analyzing and evaluating messages in commercials) (authors: Marc Doerfert, Anja Monz, Stefanie Reger)

Area of special educational support: "Gamen, daddeln, zocken – Digitale Spiele hinterfragen und verantwortungsbewusst nutzen" (Gaming – questioning digital games and using them responsibly) (author: Annette Pola); "Liken, posten, teilen – Social-Media-Angebote hinterfragen und sicher nutzen" (Liking, posting, sharing – questioning social media sites and using them safely) (author: Selma Brand)

Grades 5, 6 and 7: "Ich im Netz I – Eigene Daten schützen und mit Bildern verantwortungsvoll umgehen" (Going online I – protecting your own data and using images responsibly) (author: Dr. Kristina Hopf); "Fakt oder Fake? Glaubwürdigkeit von Online-Quellen prüfen und bewerten" (Fact or fake? Checking and evaluating the credibility of online sources) (author: Stefanie Rack); "Meine Medienstars – Inszenierungsstrategien durchschauen und hinterfragen" (My media stars – seeing through and questioning presentational strategies) (author: Kim Beck)

Grades 8 and 9: "Im Informationsdschungel – Meinungsbildungsprozesse verstehen und hinterfragen" (In the information jungle – understanding and questioning opinion-forming processes) (authors: Dr. Olaf Selg, Dr. Achim Hackenberg); "Ich als Urheber – Urheberrechte kennen und reflektieren" (As the originator – knowing and reflecting on copyright laws) (author: Dr. Kristina Hopf); "Produkt sucht Käufer: Werbung analysieren – Konsum reflektieren" (Product seeks buyer: analyzing advertising – reflecting on consumption) (authors: Christine Schulz, Undine Griebel, Anja Monz)

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