Parents can help manage children's screen time

By Charlie Kanzig Correspondent

The speed and manner in which most of us communicate today — text, Instagram, Twitter — seems normal, but the access we have to one another in this fast-paced world can be a real challenge for school-aged students and their parents.

Summertime might be the perfect time to address these concerns and form some new habits.

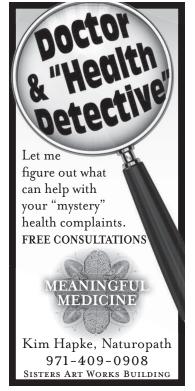
Earlier this spring, the documentary "Screenagers" was shown at Sisters High School as an outreach to parents in understanding how to better guide their kids in the age of ever-present screens.

Among other things, the documentary shines some light on some of the pitfalls of instant media, especially for teenagers, including texting, sexting, and bullying, in addition to video game and phone addiction.

Just last month three teenagers in Eugene were charged with crimes for sharing nude photos and videos over social media of female students at North Eugene High School. The instant-ness and ease of sharing personal and very private information can cause real trouble for those bent on trouble as well as for those who are not mature enough to handle the phone in their hands.

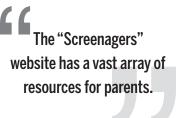
In addition to the dark side of harassment and bullying through social media, there is a great concern about the overuse of screened devices

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as well as the content that young people are exposing themselves to, including sexually explicit and violent material. Parents often find themselves in real battles with their children when attempting to separate them from their beloved screens.

Experts agree that for parents, an informed, evenhanded approach with clear, reasonable guidelines is what most teenagers need most, when it comes to being responsible digital citizens and to staying safe in a world saturated by stimulating information.



One of the resources on

to the house for phones to be placed after school or at dinnertime, where they remain until homework, chores, and dinner are finished. Other families have a "lights-out" rule during which the phone is turned off or disabled at bedtime. The concept is to have agreed-upon guidelines to avoid overuse and to also lessen the likelihood of disagreements.

Although many Americans want to deny the possibility, addiction to screens, particularly when it comes to video games, is a growing concern among mentalhealth professionals. The content of what children are able to access is an additional issue that requires diligence and even intervention since violent and adult content is just a click away if parental controls are not employed.

PBS Newshour produced a show last year titled effects due to overexposure to screens. (Find the link with the online version of this story at www.nuggetnews.com.)

The "Screenagers" website has a vast array of resources for parents, including apps for monitoring and blocking smart phones, information about digital citizenship, research on this topic, the impact on sleep, and nontechnology alternatives to engage teens.

Summertime in Sisters Country affords countless alternatives to being in front of a screen, but it may take some planning, persuading, pulling, and pushing by parents to get things moving. Left unattended, young people might spend hours and hours locked onto a screen when they could be enjoying the outdoors, reading, working at a job, volunteering, or partaking in non-screen play.

Parents are advised to

develop a game plan before speaking to their teenager about screen time. Kids are so accustomed to having free and constant access to their phone, games and consoles that they tend to be "battleready" when it is suggested that they limit their use or are asked to exert more selfcontrol. A firm, but gentle, sharing of concern followed by a reasonable plan of action can work well. Writing down the agreement is essential. Parents are encouraged to check their own use, or overuse as the case may be, of screen time for their own sake and so as to not appear completely hypocritical.

Sharing with other parents in a sort of "support group" fashion can be effective as well. This is a hot topic that many parents are very concerned about, but are of uncertain how to approach.

