



ENGAGING, SAFE, AND EVIDENCE-BASED:

What Science Tells Us About How to Promote Positive Development and Decrease Risk in Online Spaces for Early Adolescents

Recommendations for ensuring that young adolescents can learn and thrive online:

1

Digital technology should scaffold healthy development and promote wellness. Digital platforms can and should promote positive growth for young adolescents by scaffolding healthy learning, entertainment, and emotional, social, physical, and sexual development.

- Digital technology should be explicitly designed to enhance core aspects of positive early adolescent development, maximize wellness, and ensure that the benefits of using digital platforms outweigh the risks.
 - Designs should be developmentally appropriate and youth-centered. They should not be “kid versions” of applications and platforms that were originally designed and intended for adult use. Youth, parents, and experts in early adolescent development should all be actively involved in the design of digital platforms for young people.
-

2

Digital technology should have design and use requirements that make it safe for early adolescents. Social media and other digital platforms that are used by large numbers of children and young adolescents should incorporate explicit measures to acknowledge and support these users. Policymakers should introduce regulation and oversight to minimize harm.

- Policies regarding the collection and use of personal data from social media and other digital platforms should be transparent to early adolescent users of digital technology and their parents and should require their consent. Digital technology companies should perform ongoing safety monitoring and use young adolescent users’ data to refine features of their platforms to better promote healthy development and well-being and remove features and content that are harmful.
- Targeted advertising should not be allowed for users below a certain age. Other models that allow digital technology companies to sustain profitable business models should be considered.
- Digital technology features that pose known risks for long-term consequences should be highly regulated for users below a certain age, and accurate age verification methods should be enforced.
- Both digital technology companies and young adolescent users of digital technology should have opportunities to receive training on how to ensure that online spaces for early adolescents are safe.

3

Digital technology used by young adolescents should incorporate and advance the best available research as part of its design and evaluation process. Digital technology companies and policymakers should require independent evaluation by experts in developmental science, mental health, and other relevant areas for any digital technology platforms that may carry real health concerns for young adolescents. Additional funding for research, communication of best practices for supporting youth in online spaces, and collaboration with parents, youth, educators, clinicians, and youth-serving organizations will allow us to harness the power of digital technology to reach young people, while also ensuring they remain safe.

- Digital technology companies should rely on research into early adolescent development and resulting expert recommendations and regulations to improve their products and ensure that they promote positive development and limit harm during early adolescence.
- An evidence-based approach should be required moving forward so that researchers and digital technology companies continue to analyze and evaluate information regarding the online use and experiences of early adolescents to maintain a current understanding of what will produce positive change as digital technology evolves over time.

4

All young adolescents should have reliable access to the level of digital connectivity and devices required to fully participate in their education and learning. Digital technology companies should center equity, accessibility, and inclusion when designing products for youth so that young people from a diverse range of communities can benefit from online opportunities to explore, discover, learn, and connect with peers.

- Digital technology companies should acknowledge inequities in access to devices, reliable internet, information about safe use of digital products, and other online resources. They should take proactive steps to make their products accessible to all young users who may benefit from their online spaces.
- When considering profit models that do not rely on targeted advertising, digital technology companies should consider ways to overcome access inequities that may arise from fee-based or subscription models.
- Digital technology companies should develop age requirement algorithms that are inclusive and not reliant on exclusionary requirements like birth certificates or provision of parents' personal information.

From Odgers, C.L., Allen, N.B., Pfeifer, J.H., Dahl, R.E., Nesi, J., Schueller, S.M., Williams, J. L., and the National Scientific Council on Adolescence (2022). Engaging, safe, and evidence-based: What science tells us about how to promote positive development and decrease risk in online spaces, Council Report No 2.

Read the Full Report: developingadolescent.semel.ucla.edu/topics/item/youth-and-digital-tech