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New Report Outlines Research-Informed Standards to Help Middle Schoolers Thrive Online

Experts explain why 10 to 13 is a critical age to support youth in their use of tech—and why we should expect more from tech companies

LOS ANGELES, Calif., December 1, 2022—LOS ANGELES, December 1, 2022—Digital technology could boost wellbeing and online safety for middle-school-aged youth by using research-based standards to design with youth in mind, according to a new report released today from the National Scientific Council on Adolescence (NSCA), part of the UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent. The report, Engaging, Safe, and Evidence-Based: What Science Tells Us About Helping Early Adolescents Learn and Thrive Online, recommends regulations and policies for digital technology to promote positive development for young adolescents.

"We know how to design spaces for young adolescents in ways that help them safely explore, socialize and learn," said report co-author Candice Odgers, Co-Director of the Connecting the EdTech Research EcoSystem (CERES) network at the University of California Irvine. "If we apply this knowledge to online spaces, we have an enormous opportunity to support and protect young people where they are now spending much of their time."

The report explains what research says middle schoolers need during these years and explores findings from studies on digital technology used by youth that could help policymakers and digital technology companies promote positive development and limit harm.

The authors offer specific suggestions to ensure that digital tech like social media:

- Supports healthy development and well-being
- Keeps young users safe
- Incorporates and advances the best available research
- Is accessible in beneficial ways to all young adolescents

"The period from about 10 to 13 is a really interesting window when kids are transitioning into adolescence while also starting to explore a wider, less-supervised online world," said Jennifer Pfeifer, PhD, Co-Director of the NSCA and professor at the University of Oregon. "We wanted to highlight the kinds of policies that research suggests could amplify the benefits of tech while reducing risks for young users."

The report was written by leading researchers studying the effects of technology on young people: in addition to Dr. Odgers and Dr. Pfeifer, co-authors include Jacqueline Nesi, PhD, leader at the Brown-Lifespan Center for Digital Health at Brown University; Ron Dahl, MD, Director of the Institute of Human Development at UC Berkeley, and Nick Allen, PhD, Director of the Center for Digital Mental Health at the University of Oregon.

To download the full report, visit developingadolescent.org/topics/item/youth-and-digital-tech. For more information or to schedule an interview with one of the lead authors, contact Meghan Forder at meghanforder@ucla.edu.

About the Center for the Developing Adolescent

The Center for the Developing Adolescent works to equitably improve adolescent health, education, and well-being. We do this by building bridges between research, programs, and policy.