

Talking Digital - Basic information for professionals on discussing digital device use

Why do young people use digital media?

The use of digital media is a popular leisure time activity and, particularly for gaming, a hobby that is important for many people. For young people, social media, games and phones in general are channels for meeting friends and possibly getting to know new people.

- There are many things about digital devices that typically bring a lot of benefit to young people, which is why taking away the device is often not the best option. Instead, changing to a different game or limiting the use of devices to a certain time of the day can help.

You can examine the use of digital media with the pupil from two perspectives:

Perspective 1: How much and how devices are used

When discussing digital media, it is essential to examine whether the young person's everyday life is mostly balanced.

Especially the following are indications of a balanced everyday life:

- School is going well: the pupil goes to school and has hardly any unauthorised absences.
- The young person has hobbies or other things that interest them as well as friends.
- The teenager is not usually tired and generally feels well.

Another important factor is when and how they use phones or other digital devices:

- Does the young person use their phone when they need it or e.g. when they are bored?
- Do you use devices when you have time or often when you should be doing something else, such as homework or going to bed?

It is also good to try to distinguish between:

- short-term disadvantages, such as gaming or being glued to the phone on a holiday more than in everyday life
- longer-term adverse effects that affect, for example, everyday coping and mood

Perspective 2: What do young people see and experience on their devices

It is also important to examine what happens on the phone, especially whether a young person encounters harassment and/or bullying online. Young people often normalise harassment and bullying, and it may be difficult to talk about these things at home. This is why it is best to also ask about harassment and bullying at school.

Source: Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: Gaming and young people:
<https://thl.fi/aiheet/alkoholi-tupakka-ja-riippuvuudet/rahapelit/nuorten-pelaaminen/nuorten-digipelaaminen>



Why bring up digital well-being?

- young people are aware of challenges

Young people are often aware of the issues in their use of digital devices, but changing your habits by yourself may be difficult. We must keep in mind that young people's ability to regulate themselves has not yet fully developed.

- 32% of pupils in grades 8–9 have felt that they should spend more time outside of the internet and have tried to change this without success.
- In 2021, the majority of young people (67%) reported that they would like to spend more time with each other without social media

Sources: MLL: Nuorten mediakysely 2024, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: School Health Promotion Study 2023, Children and Youth Foundation: The Social Media of Dreams 2021: What youngsters wish from future social media

What to consider in the discussion with the young person?

The most important thing is to try to create an open and encouraging atmosphere: focus on listening to the young person and understanding them.

When you understand the reasons for a young person's actions and thinking, it is easier to come up with sensible solutions together. In an encouraging atmosphere, even unpleasant things become easier to discuss.

1) Think about your own attitudes: what is your relationship with games and social media?

- a) What apps or games do you use yourself?
 - b) How do you feel about social media and games as leisure activities?
 - c) How much do you use your phone yourself?
- The same challenges also affect many of us adults.

2) Trust yourself and be interested in learning.

You do not need to be an expert in gaming or social media. The most important thing is that you are interested in hearing the pupil out.

3) Remember that usually there is a reason for all behaviours - or a variety of reasons. Be open-minded when listening to the young person.

4) Do not force the young person to say that they have problems with digital devices. There may be something else (too) on the background.

5) If you are worried about the young person's well-being, bring your concern up as neutrally as possible.

- This way, the young person does not feel like they have done something wrong but that the purpose of the discussion is to come up with ways for the young person to feel better.
- Justify your concerns using "I" statements. "I've been wondering how you are doing because you are often tired in the morning and you come to school late. How do you feel about the situation?"



Online bullying and harassment

Why is it important to talk about cyberbullying?

The Talking Digital questionnaire asks about cyberbullying. It is important to ask about bullying because many young people have experienced bullying, but do not have an adult who they could talk to. When a professional raises the issue, they also validate the importance of it. **It may have been difficult for the young person to open up, and talking about it is a sign of trust in you.** It is therefore important to act in a trustworthy manner. **If a young person shares an issue, it is important that the professional takes it seriously,** follows the school's instructions, and listens to the pupil.

Note: If the young person is unable to identify bullying or has normalised the action targeted at them, you can explain that bullying may involve e.g. mean comments and pictures, threats, spreading rumours or private information, or embarrassing or harassing someone on social media, games or elsewhere online. Cyberbullying may also include sharing or liking such harmful content.

Source: MLL : Nettikysäminen mll.fi/vanhemmille/tietoa-lapsiperheen-elamasta/hyvinvointia-digijassa/nettikysaaminen/



Online harassment

- what are the effects of the Criminal Code?

The form also asks about online harassment. Here you can find information on topical amendments to the provisions on sexual offences.

Sexual harassment is one part of harassment. The provisions on sexual offences in the Criminal Code were reformed on 1 January 2023. Under the Act, sexual harassment may also be committed by other means than touching. Thus, sharing a sexual image, such as a nude picture, without permission is punishable.

The new Act places more emphasis on the child's integrity. The so-called age of consent laid down in the Finnish Criminal Code is 16 years. A sexual action committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16 meets the criteria of an offence. **It is also worth keeping in mind that even if the child has started the discussion with the adult online, the responsibility lies with the adult.** Whether a child has consented to explicit messaging with an adult is irrelevant from the legal perspective.

What if a young person gets e.g. a picture of genitals or a sexually explicit message?

Sexual harassment also includes sending someone a message or a picture that violates their sexual autonomy. Showing the picture or message to others may also constitute sexual harassment.

What if a young person's nude picture gets shared without permission?

Showing or sharing a sexual image or video of another person may constitute illegal sharing of a sexual image if the act significantly violates the person's sexual autonomy. Even if the person appeared in the photo or video voluntarily, it may not be shared without their permission.

If a person over the age of 15 shares images of a person under 18 years of age, this constitutes a crime.

What to do if you suspect that a young person has been a victim of a crime?

- Thank the young person for their trust in bringing the matter up. Reassure that what happened is not the young person's fault and that the perpetrator (e.g. the person who shared the images) is responsible for their actions.
- You can report the offence to the police together: poliisi.fi/en/report-a-crime
- Ask the young person to block the person on social media who has shared the photos or done other things that may have violated the young person's sexual autonomy.

If possible, you can also request:

- for the teenager to take a screenshot of what happened.
- that the teenager not delete the images and messages as they can be useful for investigating the crime.
- that the teenager reports the person and, if necessary, inappropriate content to the service administrator.