

MODERATOR'S DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE FILM (Runtime: 68 minutes. Directed by: Delaney Ruston, M.D.)

Screenagers is about the impact of the digital age on children and how to help them minimize harmful effects and find balance. After seeing the film, people tell us that they feel more confident and better equipped to establish balance around screen time.

TIPS ON LEADING YOUR DISCUSSION

- Before the screening, familiarize yourself with the resources section of the *Screenagers* website at www.screenagersmovie.com.
- As you view the film, note the stories and science that you find most significant.
- At the start, announce how long the discussion will last. For example, "We are excited to have about 30 minutes to discuss the important points raised in the film."
- If children are in the audience, acknowledge them and invite them to participate in the conversation alongside the adults.
- You can start with a simple question like, "What stories from the film resonated with you most?" You could share a reaction you may have had, such as this mom who said, "I could really relate to the boy's mom who said her son can't get off Minecraft. I feel so conflicted about what is the healthy amount of time for video games."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND INFORMATION

1. SOCIAL MEDIA AND VIDEO GAMES

Question: *How do girls and boys differ in their use of video games and social media?*

Info: A Kaiser Family Foundation survey found that boys spend about 1½ hours a day on average playing video games, while girls spend on average about 40 minutes day playing video games. On the other hand, according to a Common Sense Media census, girls spend on average 1½ hours a day on social media while boys spend about 50 minutes per day.

Question: *Do you think that **violent video games** are desensitizing?*

Info: First-person shooter games were first developed by the military to decrease sensitivity to shooting people.

Question: *How do feel about how time kids spend on cell phones affects their **social skill development**?*

Info: In the film, Tessa explains that she wants a smart phone so she “can look busy in awkward situations.”

Info: A study described in the film reported that kids at an outdoor camp without screens for a week were able to identify emotional cues better than kids who had screen access.

2. BRAIN SCIENCE

Question: Which of the brain studies mentioned in the film surprised you the most?

Info: Some of the **brain research** highlighted in the film —

- The part of the brain that is responsible for things such as planning and impulse control (the frontal cortex) grows slowly over the teen years and is not fully developed until our 20s.
- During adolescence is when a person is most susceptible to pleasure-producing behaviors and substances.
- MRI brain scans of people that play video games for about 20 hours a week show patterns similar to scans of people addicted to drugs.

Question: Were you surprised to learn about clinical internet/video game **addiction**?

Info: In the film, Andrew’s family discovers that he has dropped out of college after failing all his classes due to video game use. (Today Andrew is doing well and studying nature conservation.)

Info: Some of the key elements of internet/video game addiction are obsessive thoughts, significant negative life consequences, withdrawal (i.e., being severely annoyed when not on a screen), tolerance (needing more and more time), and using the activity to relieve anxiety or guilt.

3. SCHOOLS

Question: What **personal device guidelines** would you like your school to consider enforcing on campus?

Info: Some middle schools require students to keep their phones in their lockers but Delaney, the filmmaker, has noticed more middle schools allowing usage throughout the day.

Question: What have people seen schools do to address screen time issues in their school?

Info: Schools range from providing ongoing **Digital Citizenship curriculum** to having an assembly on cyberbullying to doing nothing at all. Digital citizenship addresses matters of responsibility, ethics and balance as they relate to using technology. The good news is, you can find a link to Common Sense Media’s K-12 Digital Citizenship curriculum on our website.

4. SOLUTIONS

Question: *What are some actions you could try or have found successful to help avoid screen time overuse in your family?*

Info: How to **set better rules** —

- Include kids in the discussion around setting goals and rules.
- Use rewards as a motivator — rewards work better than punishment for kids.
- Have frequent short conversations with kids about the favorable and challenging aspects of technology. Observe the rules and modify them as you discover what works best.

Info: Some parents are hesitant to share the rules they have tried or are using, for fear of being judged. It is great to give the audience examples of rules you have heard about.

Examples from the filmmaker’s family: Tessa is not allowed to use her phone in her bedroom, even during the day. (It’s a place where she reflects, reads, etc.) Also, no cell phones are used in the car except for directions. When the kids do homework, they put their phones out of sight and then take “tech breaks” every 20 or 30 minutes. This emphasizes learning to stay on task and not task-shifting too frequently. It is still a challenge — kids digress at times, mom issues reminders, eye rolling happens.

Info: When excessive screen time is causing a lot of stress in the home, turning to a school or outside **counselor** can be extremely helpful. In the film we see Chris’ grandmother go to a counselor and get practical advice on setting limits.

Info: Finding **more offline activities** for kids is an essential step in decreasing screen time.

END THE DISCUSSION

Please remind people to visit www.screenagersmovie.com to join our **Tech Talk Tuesdays** and access the many resources that are being frequently updated.

You can encourage others to **host a screening** like this one.



The Screenagers team thanks you for being a moderator and participating in this positive movement for the health of our kids! We would love to hear how it went, so please email us at info@screenagersmovie.com.