



UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S YOUTH

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CULTURE QUOTES

“In Canada, there are 3.2 million youth between the ages of 12–19 who are at risk for developing depression.”

Royal Ottawa Health
Care Group, May 2013

Video Game Addiction

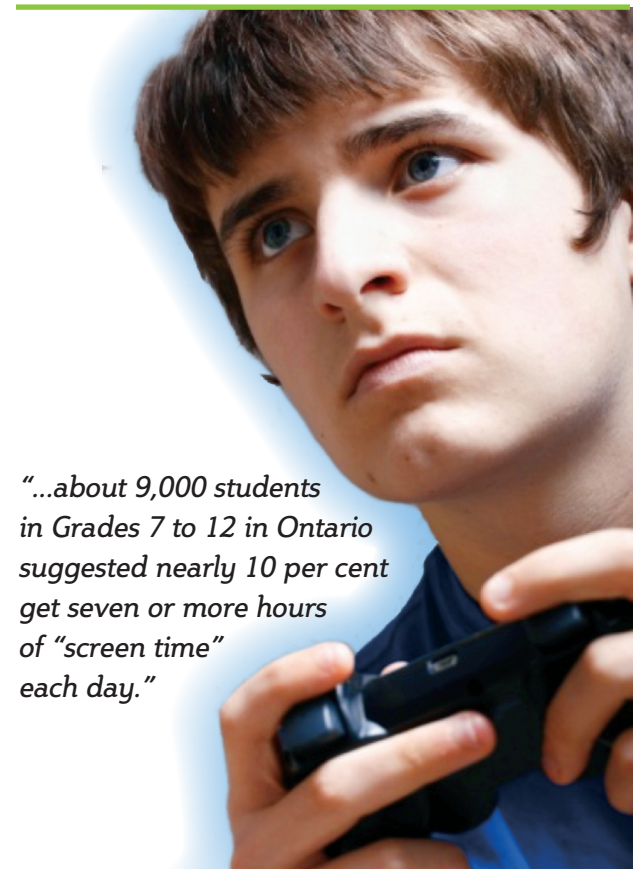
Philip passes his mom in the kitchen. Both of them are busy getting breakfast. Mom will soon walk out the door to work. Philip will crawl into bed after playing online games all night. The mother readily admits she's not sure what to do. He is 19 years old, dropped out of school, and now spends hours and days hooked on online gaming.

A 2009 survey by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto of about 9,000 students in Grades 7 to 12 in Ontario suggested nearly 10 per cent get seven or more hours of “screen time” each day. Just over 10 per cent reported a video gaming problem in the previous year.

Dr. Brent Conrad is a Clinical Psychologist in Halifax, NS and the creator of TechAddiction.ca. He offers an exhaustive list of the warning signs for the addiction. They include lowered interest in school achievement, feelings of anger when not allowed to access the video game, feeling depressed or anxious when not playing, lack of sleep or significant changes in sleep patterns, poor or irregular eating habits, staying up late into the night to play, and declining social invitations so that game playing can continue.

As a parent, dealing with a child who appears to be addicted to video games can be a battle, but remember it is one you can win. Dr. Conrad has a list of very practical strategies in his online book “How to Help Children Addicted to Video Games.” (You can download the book for \$25 at www.techaddiction.ca). One, set and enforce new limits on play. However, be prepared to do what you say or you will lose. Probably the biggest mistake parents make is not following through. Two, they need to have all homework done before watching TV or gaming. It doesn't matter how badly they complain, there is no exception to the rule. Three, you need to create balance by encouraging other activities. Work with your child to find other activities that they can engage in. Remember they will not find anything as entertaining but with time you can modify their behaviours.

Five, seek a deeper understanding of what attracts them to the games they play. What aspects appeal the most to him or her? Ask your child to describe their favourite character, especially if it is one they have created. Finally, there should be no consoles or computers in the bedroom. Apart from an online safety issue, having unlimited access to games and screens is only looking for trouble.



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The world of gaming and technology is new reality for our kids. It might not be something we are comfortable with but our role as an effective parent is to monitor their game time, guide them into good choices, and help them have balance in their life.

The Age of No Tomorrows

There is a silent sense of pessimism and despair permeating our youth culture. You see it reflected in the eyes of teens like Amanda Todd and Rehtaeh Parsons who took their own lives after being mercilessly cyber bullied. Feeling no one cares and no one has an answer, they opt for the unthinkable.

In 1971, American singer-songwriter Joan Baez penned the words to The Hitchhiker's Song. Reflecting on her world of no direction, she writes, "You are the orphans in an age of no tomorrows." Her generation sang it, the next generation believed it, and the current generation now lives it.

The anxiety she now sees in seven and eight year olds used to be reserved for adults.

The story for teens is no better. When asked why so many kids are doing drugs, both legal and illegal, one high school guidance counselor in Brampton responds, "It is because they live without hope. Kids are just feeling hopeless and this is their way of coping."

You see hopelessness written in so many of their behaviours—cutting, huffing, scarfing, tattoos, body piercing, body mutilation, branding, drug usage, smoking, gang behaviour, street racing, popularity of the X games, choking games, building jumping, and sexual

ness and further away from God. Many of our young people have lost their sense of who they are and who God is. As kids look to experience things in more and more extreme ways they often display less respect for themselves and others around them. This, in part, explains bullying.

"...kids deal with the breakdown of their families, poverty, school pressures, and a world filled with terror and danger around every corner."

There are a number of cultural clues that point toward the growing sense of despair we see in young people. First, there is a general anxiety and hopelessness about all the negative things they see going on in the world. Second, the use of technology can be used to cyber bully any child, anytime, anywhere. Third, being troubled is a new way for teens to express themselves, thanks to YouTube, blogs, and online diaries. Fourth, the massive amount of information our kids have at their disposal can be overwhelming and difficult for a young mind to process. Fifth, we have millions of young people broken by family trauma including divorce and separation. Sixth, they live in an increasingly competitive culture and pressure to do well in everything they engage in. Seventh, a range of environmental disasters including the global warming debate which often strikes fear and anxiety into the lives of many younger children. Finally, they live with the fear of terrorism both human (Sandy Hook school, Boston Marathon, Canadian plot to bomb train) and environmental.

The Youth Unlimited team is dedicated to bringing hope to the hopeless. They will do their best to bring love and healing when the family falls apart; be a father to the fatherless; give direction and understanding not found in media and technology; and, bring Truth to those lost in a world of lies. Every adult needs to find a way to speak hope into the life of young people - together we can make a difference.

promiscuity. All of these activities push life to the edge and allow you to fill the emptiness while living for the moment. As Richard Paul Evans writes in his novel, The Sunflower, "We never feel more alive than when our existence is uncertain."

Youth culture is infused with the need for yet another thrill. We see a growing disrespect for self as they drift deeper into hopeless-



"It's not the end that scares me with every breath, It's life that scares me to death." —18 year old boy, Tillsonburg, ON

Speak with anyone working with children and see how much stress racks and riddles even the youngest in our society. They are filled with uncertainty and stress. A social worker who has worked with children in St. John's, NL for 20 years sees it in epidemic proportions as kids deal with the breakdown of their families, poverty, school pressures, and a world filled with terror and danger around every corner.

The Power of a Picture

The Kaiser Family Foundation in America refers to them as Generation M2. A generation of young people whose lives are defined by the media they watch and the pictures they see. The "word" generation of their forefathers has been replaced by a "picture" cohort who lives in front of screens.

Ravi Zacharias, in his lecture entitled "Reaching the Next Generation," has some great insights on the power of all these images in the lives of our young people. Ravi proposes that even though we may think that video (includes all types of visual representation) is one of the greatest inventions of all time it still doesn't supersede the power of a word, both written and spoken. Pictures and video have inherent dangers which we pay little attention to. It is this point that anyone working with or relating to young people needs to be aware of.

The greatest problem with pictures and video is that it limits your imagination and basically manipulates you to see the world the way the other person wants you to see it. The word, on the other hand, will always give you power of your imagination. For example, think of the last story or novel you read that didn't include pictures. How did you visualize the main character? What geographical setting did you imagine? How did all of these things add to the pleasure of your reading? We are only limited by our imaginings.

The power of pictures can no doubt be a wonderful thing as you look at family photographs and pictures of nature. However, you know the context of the pictures and their intention is to bring happiness and good memories. In other cases, pictures can say many things which aren't true and make us believe things about ourselves that we shouldn't.

For example, look at this ad for Amethyst Jeans that appeared in a popular teen girl magazine. If asked to describe the picture, what would you say? Three happy good looking teens dressed nicely. However, what is the picture really communicating to our young girls? It says a number of things.

First, a simple Amethyst ad for jeans is not selling a product but values and ultimately a worldview of what it means to be loved, what it means to be desirable, what it means to be worthy, what the standard of beauty is, what

makes you valuable to a guy, what guys expect from girls, what part of your body is most important, and that the avenue to ultimate happiness is in your genes (beauty) and jeans (prestige).

Second, there is nothing about character to be considered. The inner beauty and value of a person isn't important. The worth of a person is determined by a marketer who dresses them and whose only goal is to make money off his clientele. What happens to them in the process is of little importance to the shareholders.



Three, it sets a standard of beauty to aspire to and the image tells guys what makes a female valuable and worthy of their attention. It sends a message about where to place your hope and trust—in your looks. The worldview message is that you are to trust your own intuition and feelings and this can be your life and happiness if you buy Amethyst Jeans.

Finally, the ad tells the girls viewing it that they should be disappointed with themselves. Every ad that targets young people (and in fact all of us) tells them they should be unhappy with what they have and the happiness portrayed in the ad can only be attained through the purchase of their product. If the average teen in Canada sees a hundred thousand ads per year, all of them selling disappointment, no wonder we have so many living on the edge of depression.

Zacharias also points out that the visual also has the ability to hijack the truth. We now think we know the truth, especially about ourselves, when we see something, not know something. A young girl looking at this begins to think that this is what she should look like and in the process will begin to abandon her true self. The reality is she can never achieve the air-brushed perfection she sees before her.

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The visual will never fully satisfy; it will only leave you hungering for more and more. When we start seeing through our eyes devoid of a conscience or moral absolutes, we soon create a reality to fit our own desires. This in part explains the normalization of pornography and many other graphics that used to be considered taboo.

Parents and youth workers need to be aware of the power of the visuals in our culture and their ability to shape the values, beliefs, and behaviours of our young people. Our role as responsible adults is to bring truth and guidance into lives dependent on what they see and not what they really know.

Driving While Intoxicated



Teenagers, given their stage of brain development, are wired to take risks and underestimate consequences. We see it in all kinds of behaviours and we can now add the dangers involved with driving and texting.

State Farm Insurance (July 2010) has the evidence to prove it. Despite plenty of academic and controlled research showing that texting while driving can be as hazardous as drinking and driving, most teens simply don't believe that's the case. In a poll conducted by Harris Interactive in which 14-to-17 year-olds were asked whether they thought they would die one day if they regularly text and drive, only 35 percent of those asked strongly agreed with that statement. Compare that figure with the 55 percent of teens who think that drinking and driving could prove deadly, and you begin to see the real problem.

The same group believed that their chances of getting into an accident are higher while drinking and driving versus texting and driving. It is obvious a large number of young people appear to not fully understand the potential consequences of drinking while driving in spite of the millions of educational dollars

that have been spent the last 20 years to convince them otherwise. Teens still believe that bad things will never happen to them.

These statistics from www.textinganddriving-safely.com should underscore the danger factor for all of us. First, five seconds is the minimal amount of time your attention is taken away from the road when you are texting and driving. At 100 km. per hour, you travel more than the length of a football field without looking at the road. Second, with the longest eyes-off-the-road drive time of distracted driving activities, text messaging makes an accident 23X more likely. Third, 13 percent of drivers 18-20 involved in car wrecks admitted to talking or texting on their mobile devices at the time of the crash. Fourth, almost half of teenage boys and 45 percent of girls admit to texting while driving. At age 18, a staggering 58 percent admit to it. Finally, 77 percent of young adults are very or somewhat confident that they can safely text

while driving and 55 percent of young adults claim it's easy to text while driving. Reality is teens who text while driving spend 10 percent of this time outside of their lane.

If more things are caught than taught, then parents and adults are also part of the problem. Studies show 48 percent of teen drivers have seen their parents drive while talking on a cell phone and 15 percent of young drivers have seen their parents text while driving. And if it's not happening in their car, kids can probably see some of the other 27 percent of adults who claim to text while driving.

Youth Unlimited would like to offer the following suggestions to help parents with this issue. One, parents need to model the type of safe driving they want their teens to practice; turn the cell phone off when you get behind the wheel, your kids are more valuable than any text or call you will ever receive. Two, you need to talk to your children about the real dangers involved. You might not believe it, but your opinion is still valued by them regardless of how they roll their eyes. Three, if you suspect texting while driving is an issue, make them leave their phone at home or don't give them the car. It is better to be safe than sorry. Finally, parents can check out technology based solutions. DriveCam (www.drivecam.com) monitors a driver's activity and provides real-time feedback with video. AT&T Drive Mode is a free anti-texting and driving mobile app for Android and Blackberry which will allow parents to remotely control their children's cell phone service, cutting off their phones' ability to text, browse the Web, or receive and make calls when they're behind the wheel.

Teaching our kids to drive responsibly in today's high tech world is just another requirement for today's parents. Helping our kids navigate the world of cars and technology will help keep them safe and help parents reduce stress levels. No one ever said raising teens would be tranquil.



Pop culture got your kids? Youth Unlimited wants to help you get them back.

Youth Culture Specialist Paul Robertson has 16 seminars to help you deepen your relationship with the young people in your life by better understanding their culture. All articles were written by Paul.

To book Paul for your group call 416-520-6831 or check www.paulrobertson.ca for details.