



## Episode 161: Digital Well-being for Youth (Transcript)

- Ike Evans: Hi, welcome to "Into the Fold," the mental health podcast. I'm your host, Ike Evans, and for this episode, we are talking about digital well-being for youth.
- Dr. Emily Weins...: This youth focus is and this sort of attention to nuance and detail is so important given the big, sweeping claims that we hear left and right in news headlines and from some researchers about these big impacts technology is having on young people's sense of well-being. And so we really want to bring a more textured, [00:00:30] nuanced perspective. What are kids actually experiencing?
- Ike Evans: It's become commonplace nowadays for adults to lament the screen time of young people, and evidence seems to suggest that there is real cause for concern. In 2023, the American Psychological Association issued a health advisory focusing on adolescent social media use. [00:01:00] The advisory offers a set of recommendations for minimizing the harmful impacts of social media on adolescents and maximizing its potential benefits. And then the U.S. surgeon general followed with its own advisory. To quote the surgeon general, "Social media can have a profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents. There is evidence that social media may contribute to issues [00:01:30] like depression, anxiety, toxic social comparison, sleep problems, body-image issues, and disordered eating," unquote.
- In other words, there are legitimate reasons to worry about teens online lives and the effect that that may be having on their well-being. But what is an evidence-based path forward, one that avoids either complacency or scaremongering. Dr. Carrie James and Dr. [00:02:00] Emily Weinstein are co-founders of the Center for Digital Thriving at Harvard University. In their book "Behind Their Screens," Emily and Carrie draw on a survey of more than 3,500 teens with the objective of adding to our understanding of teens' online lives. They're here with us today to help us understand how young people navigate our increasingly networked world and how we balance safety, empathy, and technology. [00:02:30] Carrie and Emily, thanks for joining us.
- Dr. Emily Weins...: So great to be here. Thank you for having us.
- Dr. Carrie Jame...: Thank you.

Ike Evans: So I thought that I would first start with just asking how it is that you each came to be interested in this area of research, teens in tech?

Dr. Carrie Jame...: Well, thank you for the question, and thank you so much for having us here. So, I'll talk a little bit first about [00:03:00] the way I came into this topic. I'm a sociologist by training, and historically and actually up to the present, most of my work has been really qualitative, so doing interviews with people, particularly young people. I joined a research center, our home base Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, around 2003. And at that time, I was doing qualitative work with a psychologist here named Howard Gardner, looking at [00:03:30] different ethical issues in realms of work, actually. And at that moment in time, there was--Actually a couple of years later, around 2007, 2008, there was an uptick of interest in how digital media was changing the face of lots of things. So learning for young people, civic participation, but also ethical issues. And because we were doing some work on [00:04:00] ethics, we became interested in also looking at how the digital realm was affecting particularly the way young people think about moral and ethical themes. And we were fortunate enough to have some funding from the MacArthur Foundation that invested a lot of resources in looking at the question of how digital media was changing young people's experiences. And that really got me into the topic and got me partnering with Emily Weinstein, who came to do her [00:04:30] doctoral work at Harvard Graduate School of Education around the time that we were doing this research.

Dr. Emily Weins...: And Ike, I would just say, I don't know how, as an adolescent psychologist, I could not be interested in this topic. It feels like we have all of these technologies that are just profoundly shaping and in some cases reshaping the ways that we interact and the sort of trajectories of adolescents' everyday lives and their development. And [00:05:00] Carrie and I had this front-row seat to Instas and Finstas and then Snap Maps and group chats. And if it sounds like I'm speaking a foreign language, we can talk about what all those different terms mean. But really we often talk about--in development, in human development, we often talk about contexts and how much context matters. And this is such an interesting one because at once we have these technologies and these social media communities and gaming communities that are [00:05:30] contexts, right? They are contexts where interactions and exploration are taking place. And with the shift to smartphones, we were also seeing suddenly that these technologies were actually intersecting with all of the other contexts of teens' everyday lives because they're moving through their different spaces of their lives with these technologies alongside them in many cases. And so I think curiosity has driven our work because we're just fascinated by the ways that tech can be beneficial and positive [00:06:00] and the ways it can get toxic.

Ike Evans: With so much ink being spilled about the impact of technology on youth, what contribution to the discourse are you wanting to make?

Dr. Emily Weins...: So our focus is really on bringing young people's voices and stories, the details of their experiences, into the conversation. And one of the reasons for this is

that Carrie and I are really interested in breathing life into the headlines and the often very contentious debates about screen time. Our [00:06:30] work is really youth centered and it's collaborative and it's solutions oriented. So we're interested in what can happen when we listen closely and understand the pain points and the struggles in more detail so that we can use that understanding to fuel the work we do, thinking concretely about interventions and also envisioning solutions and paths forward.

Dr. Carrie Jame...: This youth focus, and this sort of attention to nuance and detail, is [00:07:00] so important given the big sweeping claims that we hear left and right in news headlines and from some researchers about these big impacts technology is having on young people's sense of wellbeing. And so we really want to bring a more textured, nuanced perspective. What are kids actually experiencing? What are some of the upsides, and what's hard specifically about growing up in a world with all this technology and why really getting that youth or teen [00:07:30] level perspective on what it's like to grow up with social media, smartphones, Fortnite, all kinds of apps at your disposal and the ability to be connected to friends around the clock. So that's really our interest.

Ike Evans: So let's get into it about your book "Behind The Screens." Why did you decide to write it?

Dr. Emily Weins...: So a couple of years ago, Emily and I, we've been doing research in this space for a really long time, really over a decade. We've been tracking teens experiences growing up in a [00:08:00] networked world. And a couple of years ago we were working with some of our collaborative partners at an organization called Common Sense Media. They create digital citizenship curriculum for schools across the US and in fact they're in many, many schools. And at that moment, we were thinking about making revisions to those materials and really wanting to make sure that the materials were aligned with [00:08:30] young people's current pain points around technology and the needs that they had. And so we had this incredible opportunity to do a new round of research and collect insights from young people. And we ended up actually with a gold mine of data, we ended up with insights from more than 3,500 teenagers about how they're navigating the digital world.

And one of the questions we asked in our research was, what worries you most about growing up with today's technologies? [00:09:00] And honestly, a lot of what we heard from teens really stopped us in our tracks. And we weren't new to this space. We had been studying teens and technology for a long time, but it felt like there was a lot more happening and more to the story. So we were really motivated to write "Behind Their Screens" in order to bring a more textured picture, a sense to adults about what's the reality for young people and really provide them with some better direction [00:09:30] for how they could talk with young people and support them in this world.

Ike Evans: And what was, I guess, your research approach in writing the book?

Dr. Emily Weins...: Yeah, so our approach was really interesting and in some ways, it departed from some earlier methods that we had used. Like I said, we had been studying teens and tech for over a decade, and we've almost always done qualitative work, but there was something unique about [00:10:00] the dataset we collected this time that pushed us into using other kinds of methods. So we ended up doing a national survey of young people and the experiences they have, and that's how we collected perspectives from over 3,500 teens. And as we started looking through the data, we noticed some things that were really, really, like I said before, stopping us in our tracks. They were really surprising insights, and we realized we actually needed help from young people to interpret the data correctly.

[00:10:30] So this was during the lockdown period of the pandemic, and we decided to convene a youth advisory council of diverse teens from all across the U.S., different backgrounds, identities, parts of the country, to work with us, dig into data, dig into the data together, and help us make sense of what we were seeing, help us identify the stories and the insights that they most needed adults [00:11:00] to hear. So that was really transformative for us in terms of research methods. And I have to say, we will not go back to doing research the other way, where we just collect data and interpret it on our own. We are really committed. Emily said before, our work is youth-centered, and it's collaborative. We're really committed to ongoing collaboration with youth in order to tell the stories they need us to hear about what it's like to grow up in a tech-filled world.

Ike Evans: And so, to the book's title [00:11:30] and maybe even the heart of this discussion, how would you characterize what it is that teens are facing and adults are missing? And Emily, why don't we start with you on that?

Dr. Emily Weins...: So much. Let me maybe give you just one concrete example to give you a sense of some of the kinds of insights that came out of our research. So, adults often talk about, appropriately, we need to be talking about the trends in adolescent mental health and the mental health [00:12:00] crisis. We think a lot about the rising rates of anxiety and depression among teens today. And often when technology is mentioned as part of that conversation, it is a question about whether social media is a cause or the cause of the mental health trends. And we kind of start and stop the conversation there. Something that was extremely interesting to us was when we started talking to teens, we saw that there was actually this sort of hidden toll of [00:12:30] the trends in adolescent mental health that was not part of the conversation but felt to us like it should be, and that was teens telling us that in a world where more of their peers are struggling with mental health and those peers have phones or social media accounts, they're often reaching out for help late at night or even around the clock, or they're crying out for help in public or semi-public ways through social media. And this can put teens [00:13:00] in a real bind.

If you're an adolescent, you're deeply committed to being a good friend. Your friendships are closely tethered to your identity, to your sense of who you are

and how you fit into the world. You care deeply about being a good friend. And now imagine that you're a teenager and it's 10:00 p.m. and maybe it's a Wednesday night and you have a math test the next morning and you have a friend who is texting you saying, "I need help. I'm having a really hard time." And your [00:13:30] desire to be a good friend gets pitted directly against your instinct to disconnect for your own self-care and to make sure you get sleep. This was so interesting to us because it actually suggests that the values that we have and that we tell teens can be important, things like empathy on the one hand and self-care and protecting sleep and studying and taking care of yourself before a test, these things can be put in tension with one another. And when we just allow very simplistic messages about [00:14:00] phones or screens, like "Get off your phone at a certain time," we can kind of miss the pulls that are actually part of why teens are feeling pulled to their phone, even when it's late at night and clearly they even know that they should be putting it away.

And recognizing that kind of tension, oh, gosh, it is so hard to figure out how to be a good friend in a world with this kind of connection. It is so hard to figure out when to connect and when to disconnect and how to manage [00:14:30] empathy and how to manage our different responsibilities. Recognizing that these things are actually hard at any age but especially so during adolescence, it really changes the ways we think about leaning into that conversation. So that's just one example of something that adults are missing. But I think it gives you a sense of how, actually, it's not like we're missing everything. For sure, we've been paying attention to the trends in mental health, but as we pull back the curtain or peel back the layers, whatever metaphor you want to use, we understand so [00:15:00] much more about the complexities of teens' experiences and then what it might mean to actually be the kinds of supporters they need.

Ike Evans: Okay. Carrie, how would you like to follow up on that?

Dr. Carrie Jame...: Well, I think Emily captured it really beautifully. I mean, the example of the hidden toll of the mental health crisis is a shining one that shows a piece of young people's experience that adults are often missing. And we heard so many other stories from [00:15:30] young people that spoke to this. I'll just share one more example. So in addition to the talk about the adolescent mental health crisis in schools, there's often a lot of talk about the issue of cyber bullying, and it can be really squarely on adults' radars when they worry about my kids and access to smartphones, that they're going to be bullied around the clock. And cyber bullying is a real issue for sure, but a lot of what we [00:16:00] heard from teens about what's hard growing up with social media falls more in the category of ambiguous or subtle jabs. So teens told us about things like being strategically cropped out of a picture from a social event or being the only one in a group picture that's posted on Instagram who doesn't get tagged, and they're left to wonder if it was an oversight or is this an intentional jab?

[00:16:30] The other set of issues that comes up for young people is around really just making sense of all of the social information that they're swimming

with that exists on their phones. And we think of really small examples that are actually really meaningful. So read receipts is one that stands out. So teens really puzzle over the ambiguity of, you sent a message to a friend, you can tell that your text message [00:17:00] has been read because there's the read receipt. And they really puzzle over the ambiguity of being left, what they call, on read or on delivered. So the read receipt tells them the message has been received, but a teen is left to wonder, why is my friend taking so long to respond? Are they mad at me? Are we no longer friends? Or if it's an intimate partner, are we no longer dating? What's going on? And so that really changes, as adults, it really changes what we [00:17:30] should be looking out for. We still need to be on the lookout for more dramatic things happening that would fit into the realm of cyber bullying. But there are also these subtle dynamics and the ways in which friendship and peer relations intersect with these other features of technology that need to be on adults' radars if we really want to help support young people.

Ike Evans: Okay. And how would you characterize the reception to the book? And also are there any other [00:18:00] books on this topic that you would recommend?

Dr. Emily Weins...: Well, I can start. So I think our favorite, among our favorite reviews have been the reviews from teens and the reactions from teens. Our book was reviewed actually, for example, in the "San Francisco Chronicle," they actually had a teen, a 16-year-old, review the book, and just hearing from teens, "This really gets it right. This is what I feel and experience," to us that is really, [00:18:30] that's the praise that we were going for. I think also we have been so moved hearing from adults who say that reading the book was such a game changer for their sense of empathy, but also their sense of confidence in connecting with their kids, which is something that is so important to us. We believe that adults have a really valuable role to play. And one of the things that has happened for us, Carrie and I are both moms, and as we've been doing this research, we have learned [00:19:00] so much that has changed the ways we think about supporting the kids in our own lives, rethinking our own tech habits, and also realizing that even if an adult has no idea what a Snap Map is or no idea why you're feeling left out because of Venmo receipts.

So I'll just give an example, in that case, we hear from teens, maybe you find out you were left out because you see on Venmo, which is the app that you charge people or you can send money, you can [00:19:30] see that your friends have all been charged for, let's just say, movie theater tickets or Dunkin' Donuts, and you realize that you were left out. So obviously, we now know a lot about some of the particulars, but the reality is that you do not as an adult need to know about these particulars in order to be the kind of coach and supporter that kids really need to navigate the stuff that's hard about tech. And so one of our hopes in writing the book was that we would [00:20:00] help invite adults into this space in a way that would feel right to teens and also help build and rebuild connection. So I think that's, at a high level, some of the reception. Before I go into other books, Care, anything else that you want to add?

Dr. Carrie Jame...: Well, you captured that so well. I think the only other thing I'll add is it's been fun hearing anecdotally from friends in the field that, "Oh, yeah, I ran into so-and-so [00:20:30] who works at this school, and they were telling me about how they now take the "Behind Their Screens" approach to thinking about their students and the way they're using tech." And that just spoke volumes to us and felt really great.

Dr. Emily Weins...: Okay. And Carrie, do you want to start off with other books that we often recommend?

Dr. Carrie Jame...: Oh, sure. So other books we recommend. So yes, we're very proud of "Behind Their Screens," but we just stand on the shoulders of giants. There are so many other media researchers doing really powerful work. So [00:21:00] one of them is our former colleague Katie Davis, at the University of Washington, recently wrote a book called "Technology's Child," which is a fabulous account of, it's almost like an age and stage discussion of young people's developmental needs actually from infancy and then early childhood up through adolescence. So their developmental needs and how those needs intersect with [00:21:30] current social media apps and games and all kinds of things.

And Katie does a really wonderful job of providing guidance for parents, and I think teachers as well, to look at specific social media apps and ask a series of questions that can help them gauge the value versus some of the risks. And she has this sort of two-pronged approach where she invites parents to ask, "Well, is the app my [00:22:00] child using self-directed or are they being kind of driven or pulled into the app in ways that are taking away their agency?" and also, "Is their use of the app being supported by me as their parent or supported by their friends? Is it community supported?" So Katie's book, I think, has brought a different kind of lens to what we've done but a complementary one that's great.

There are a number of books on tech design that we think are so important. So [00:22:30] the book "Algorithms of Oppression" and then a more recent book called "More Than A Glitch," by Meredith Broussard, really provide powerful accounts of the ways in which algorithms and the ways in which technology is designed can reinforce racist and sexist ideologies and really help us be much more attuned to those details and thinking beyond technology as this sort of independent thing that is value [00:23:00] neutral, to really realizing that it's socially and culturally shaped and shaped in ways that can affect people's lives profoundly.

Dr. Emily Weins...: And then outside of the sort of tech-specific space, I would say Lisa Damour's work and her book "The Emotional Lives of Teenagers" and Jenny Wallace's book "Never Enough" have both really shaped, I think, some of our recent thinking and just the ways that we think about teens and their basic core drives and needs and [00:23:30] how tech fits into that. And then not a book, but Carrie and I are both regular readers and big fans of Dr. Jackie Nesi's "Techno Sapiens Substack." It's an email newsletter that she sends out on Mondays, and I think she's done a really great job of making accessible a lot of the research on



teens and technology, breaking down what new studies say and what they really mean, what the implications are, and also importantly what they don't say, which [00:24:00] is something that we see often. There's this tension where it can feel when you read a headline like the researchers have just had complete clarity and certainty, and also I think she does a really good job of just sort of inviting people into that space and helping them make sense of what they're seeing for themselves.

Ike Evans:

So I would like to zoom out just to look at some of the larger discourse around screen time. It sounds to me like you're really trying to [00:24:30] problematize somewhat the going discourse around screen time. And I think one important way to do that is to tease out what are exactly the effects of screen time versus a whole host of potentially confounding variables: race, gender, class. We just went through a pandemic. From what you're saying, it sounds as if there may really be [00:25:00] a quality versus quantity distinction to be made when it comes to screen time. Just for our listeners, if either of you want to speak to that aspect of this.

Dr. Carrie Jame...:

Yeah, I mean the current discourse really does lead us, to a certain extent, astray in thinking about screen time as this big variable of concern. [00:25:30] And for Emily and I, for a long time, we have felt and argued and based on our research that screen time is actually not really the best way to think about the most important issues around teens and tech. It's not that screen time doesn't matter altogether, but the ways in which young people are using screens, what they're doing during their screen time, what they're not doing because of it. So what kinds of things are being displaced, whether it be sleep or [00:26:00] face-to-face activities and sports. These are the kinds of questions we should be asking. We also need to be asking, and you mentioned identities, what kinds of experiences young people bring to their screen-based lives based on their identities? And we know from our research, and we know from research carried out by others in this space, that youth are having really varied experiences [00:26:30] online based on their identities. And so this can kind of get lost when we only look at screen time. So let me give you some examples of how identities really affect young people's experiences. When we think about LGBTQ+ youth and their experience in their networked lives, they can have experiences where they have [00:27:00] an experience of online abuse, where they may be non-consensually outed because of their identities, but we also know from research that these young people find beneficial spaces for identity affirmation, for emotional support, for identity specific information, and that's incredibly powerful. If we think about the experiences of youth of color, we know from research that Black youth experience racialized [00:27:30] violence and hate speech online, traumatic exposure to viral images of Black death and dying, but also spaces of refuge and joy and solidarity and identity affirmation. So those experiences really roll up to this idea that screen time is not just one thing, teens are not a monolith, and we need a more fine grained textured perspective on what's happening in young people's screen-based [00:28:00] lives if we want to help them.



Ike Evans: Let us turn now to the Center for Digital Thriving First, what does digital thriving mean in your view, and what is the mission of your center?

Dr. Emily Weins...: Well, we're still in year one. We are a brand-new center and a key part of our aim is to answer that question through deep listening and research, but at a high level, we're really chasing after a vision of a world where everyone [00:28:30] can thrive as we live with new technologies. We know, this came up a bit just as Carrie was speaking about screen time, but we know even when we think about technology or screen time, that there are huge differences between social media and gaming and phones versus smartphones and generative AI, and so one of the things that we're really trying to do is bring a more nuanced approach to the conversation because we believe that actually the world we're living in demands it. And because [00:29:00] we believe that getting to a future where all youth, all young people, all people can really thrive, however tech is fitting into their lives, that will require thoughtful attention to the ways that we're all living and the ways that we're living differently with tech.

Dr. Carrie Jame...: I'll just elaborate a bit on what Emily shared there, that a big focus of our work and the kind of work we do at the Center for Digital Thriving would [00:29:30] be in the category of what we call translational research. And so this is research that is conducted for the specific purpose of, A, building new understandings, like leaning into areas where we need to know and understand more, but also creating practical resources and tools that can be actually helpful. In the case of our research, helpful to young people so that they can grow up in a world with a lot of technology and figure out ways to [00:30:00] thrive. So it's that research plus practice intersection that we're always working at the Center for Digital Thriving.

Ike Evans: Okay, so now let's talk about potential interventions. Well, actually, no. One other thing. You're very much taken with the promise that comes with involving [00:30:30] young people as co-designers, and I would just love to hear from either of you just a little bit more about why that has emerged as just such a central focus for you.

Dr. Emily Weins...: Carrie mentioned--yeah, go ahead, Care.

Dr. Carrie Jame...: So I mentioned earlier, and maybe Emily was just about to say this, that we had engaged youth as co-interpreters of our data when we were doing the research for "Behind Their Screens." But we also [00:31:00] realize that it's not just in the research that we need to partner with young people, it's in the very design of interventions that are intended to support them. So we have really taken up the approach of folks who are big fans of participatory design, and these kinds of approaches really trace back to all kinds of movements in the past, including the disability rights movement where activists really pushed for [00:31:30] design that's participatory, and they did it under a banner that we think is really inspiring. The banner is "Nothing about us, without us." So we've really taken that very seriously. We're not going to create something for young people that's

about young people without their close partnerships so that we know we're getting in the zone of the relevant things that they need.

Dr. Emily Weins...: And just practically, we see so many reasons why this feels essential. [00:32:00] And one of them is that there are so many uses and experiences that teens have around tech that weren't necessarily what the designers intended and maybe aren't even the kinds of experiences that adults have. Or maybe adults have them, but the sort of way that it's amplified for teens is so much more pronounced. So I gave the example earlier of seeing Venmo transactions. I think that's one of them. Carrie talked about the receipts that tell you that your message has been read, and we hear [00:32:30] from teens about how that can lead to second- and third-guessing. As Carrie mentioned, there are also so many different ways that you might monitor different kinds of metrics in ways that adults don't.

So one example that we heard years ago that's kind of remained relevant is how quickly your likes come in on a certain post and how long it takes before you have certain kinds of supportive comments when you post something. The number [00:33:00] of minutes after you post that you get a certain kind of comment might not be something that an adult is paying any attention to. Maybe they think about the sort of social feedback they get but not with that granularity, but understanding how that can lead to a teen monitoring and refreshing after they post, that is the kind of detail and the kind of example that we really need to understand if we want to design interventions that actually meet the pain points that are most relevant for teens [00:33:30] and the kinds of, frankly, thinking traps, which is one of the interventions we're working on, that they tell us can come up for them.

Ike Evans: Okay, and so we've touched on the need to go beyond prescriptive approaches, and so that just leads me to wanting to ask about what promising interventions there might be. And [00:34:00] also, philanthropy and what potential role that philanthropy has in just helping to address this issue.

Dr. Emily Weins...: So I can start with thinking about some of the interventions. So at kind of a high level, let me just talk you through a particular kind of challenge that we hear from teens comes up and how we're thinking about intervention resources. [00:34:30] So we talked a little bit about that experience of being left on read. So let's say that, and Ike, I don't know if you've ever had this experience, but let's say that you send a text and you see that someone else has gotten it, they've read it but they don't respond. Teens tell us how this can kind of kick off a spiral. Have you ever had an experience like this?

Ike Evans: I think I'm usually the one who's the guilty party, but yes, I know what you're talking about.

Dr. Carrie Jame...: Thank you for your honesty.

Dr. Emily Weins...: Thank [00:35:00] you for your honesty. I think if you have not been on the end of the being left on read, maybe you've had this experience of even just sending a work email and you're waiting for the person to reply, and you start to think to yourself, "Did I say the wrong thing? Should I not have said that? Are they mad at me?" And if you're a teenager, as Carrie was saying earlier, "Is this relationship over?" So that kind of thinking spiral is really interesting to interesting to us [00:35:30] in part because teens have told us how that sort of thinking can really be amplified by social media and technology.

But we know from a disciplinary perspective and from psychology for example, that these kinds of thinking traps, they're cognitive distortions, and they're not new. We actually know a lot about how they come up, and cognitive behavioral therapy or CBT has a whole evidence base around how to understand different kinds of distortions [00:36:00] and traps that can come up and how we can start to shift, how to sort of mind shift and get ourselves out of those traps so that they're not leading to unfounded anxiety and feeling really insecure.

And so we gave one example around the read receipts or read receipts, which can sort of spark this feeling of mind reading where you're thinking like, oh, they must be mad at me. But there are other traps that can come up with social media too. So if you're browsing your feed and you feel like, oh, everyone I follow [00:36:30] is happier than me or has more friends than me, that's another kind of distortion. And if you start to label yourself, if you start to think like, oh, I'm such a loser that I'm not getting more likes, or if you start to should all over yourself or you're like, I should be the kind of person who X, Y, and Z does more of a morning routine, like what I see on my TikTok or who I should be, the kind of person who can have more control even over my tech habits.

There are so many ways, these [00:37:00] are all different examples of thinking traps or cognitive distortions that come up in many different ways around tech. So one of the resources that we've been working on is actually connecting those kinds of thinking traps that teens tell us come up in the context of tech and really tracing the connections to the evidence base around CBT and trying to leverage that to help teens learn about how to label and recognize those thinking traps, how to spot them and how to even [00:37:30] shift their self-talk when they come up. So we've been working on some of those resources. We also have been working with Common Sense Education on a free lesson plan that actually takes that thinking trap kind of concept and brings it into the classroom for middle schoolers and high schoolers. And we do all of this co-design, all of this work as co-design work alongside teens and in this case educators and clinical psychologists as well. So that's one. Carrie, do you want to talk about maybe our tech and values intervention resources also?

Dr. Carrie Jame...: [00:38:00] Sure. I'll just get, so this is just one more example and it's interesting because like, in this conversation we've been talking about how important it is to tune into the details of young people's technology based lives lean into the tech. But another tech we take in resource development is to bracket the technology, at least at first. We've found that sometimes it's much more helpful [00:38:30]

to start with essential human experience, start with one's wellbeing, and then consider how tech is implicated. So our tech and values exercise is a perfect example of this. So essentially we invite young people to engage in a value sort kind of experience where they look at different values that we know are in some ways relevant to growing up in a tech [00:39:00] field world values like presence or justice or, Emily, what are...?

Dr. Emily Weins...: Connection.

Dr. Carrie Jame...: Authenticity. Authenticity.

Dr. Emily Weins...: Authenticity.

Dr. Carrie Jame...: Yeah. So we created a list of values with feedback from young people that feel really relevant, but bracket the tech for a moment and think about the values that are most important to you right now. And that's really, that's a really important foundational [00:39:30] human experience. And we know that this can be powerful because we've drawn this method from evidence-based practices and acceptance and commitment therapy, for example, and motivational interviewing. We know the power of reflecting on values as a way of affirming the values that you have. So we've actually created an app to facilitate the value sort so youth have that experience. And then we turn to [00:40:00] what is the role technologies playing in supporting the values that are most important to you right now, helping you live those values. And then turn to the question of how tech is making those values that you cherish right now so hard to live.

And this is really powerful in revealing both on an individual level. And we do this exercise with educators in our professional development workshops so that they can then do it in their classrooms with their students, [00:40:30] but it can also be a spark for a larger group discussion where we think about big picture, how is a value like justice being supported by technology on the one hand, and how is a value like justice, how does that value get undercut by the different ways we use technology? And so that's another example of the approach that we're taking to intervention development.

Dr. Emily Weins...: Okay. So appreciate this question about philanthropy. [00:41:00] I feel like we have been in just an incredible position in launching the center because our two founding grants came from funders who are really amazing to work with. We received founding grants from SCE, the Susan Crown Exchange, and Pivotal Ventures, and they have been such good thought partners and support and supporters but also extremely ready and willing to allow us to be flexible and responsive. And I think especially for funders who are interested in supporting work that is around [00:41:30] technology and research into, for example, young people's experiences with technology, the ability to be nimble is really essential. I can't even say enough how much this matters. We were just in this position of working on a new grant proposal, and we've been scoping out a

project that will unfold over several years, and it's so reasonable to question how a project about something like AI or social media will change.

And the honest answer is I [00:42:00] don't even think that any of us, the researchers, the funders, I don't think we can know for sure if we are projecting forward two to five years, how the landscape may shift in ways that have really profound implications for the projects that we're creating. So I think that we need to be able to adapt by developing rigorous ways of anticipating that projects may need to change as there are policy changes, as there are feature and tech changes.

And I think that [00:42:30] for funders, being able to think about how to really partner with supporting researchers around a nimbleness to work on topics where the landscape is changing so much so fast. And I think that if we don't have that opportunity to be nimble, if we don't have the opportunity to allow a project to change shape, we risk getting stuck doing or in some cases funding work that is irrelevant before it's even shareable, which is obviously not what anyone wants. We want [00:43:00] to be doing work that really meets the current moment and the challenges. And so I think flexibility is really important in that realm.

Ike Evans: Okay. Carrie James, Emily Weinstein, we want to thank you for taking the time out of your very busy schedules to come on and just have a conversation with us about digital well-being and youth. We appreciate it, and good luck with everything.

Dr. Emily Weins...: Thanks for having [00:43:30] us.

Dr. Carrie Jame...: Thanks for having us.

Dr. Emily Weins...: We hope that people will check out the Center for Digital Thriving, our research center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. We have links to research and resources that can change the conversations you are having today with yourself and with the teens in your lives around technology. We're so grateful for the opportunity to do this work, and thanks, Ike, for having us so we could share it with you.

Ike Evans: Before we take it home, I have a couple of announcements. We are seeking applications for the Stephanie J. Bryan Bold Spirit of Achievement Scholarships. [00:44:00] Established in 2021 to honor the memory of Stephanie Bryan, Hogg Foundation program officer, these are two \$5,000 scholarships to support the financial impact of living with a mental health challenge and/or caring for a person with a mental health challenge and the need for financial aid to advance education. You have until May 20th to apply. For more details, visit our website [00:44:30] at [hogg.utexas.edu](http://hogg.utexas.edu) and go to the funding opportunities page, which you will see a link to in the top navigation menu.

Also, the Hogg Foundation is hiring a new Hogg policy fellow. These two-year fellowships are designed to prepare an individual to effectively engage in advocacy and policy focused on supporting mental health and wellbeing. This fellowship [00:45:00] offers mentorship from colleagues with expertise in policy and mental health, works within the policy team, and reports to the director of policy. If you or someone might be interested, you can, again, visit our website, and under the Who We Are section in the main navigation, you will find the employment page. There, you will see a link to the Policy Fellow job description and details about how to apply.

[00:45:30] So where does that leave us? It isn't news that technology is upending our reality in ways not limited to social media's impact on young people, the pace and disruption of technology, particularly the internet-based technologies that increasingly govern and mediate. So much of our experience of the world and each other is outstripping anyone's ability to cope. But the young people who we often figure as the canaries [00:46:00] in the coal mine when it comes to technology, might by that same token, be the ones whose lead we should follow toward more sane horizons.

Like Carrie herself said during the interview, "Nothing about us, without us." That turn of phrase is near and dear to the mental health peer and consumer movement and in the context of digital well-being for youth, points up how young people cannot just be subjects for study and [00:46:30] intervention but co-designers and co-creators of the future we would create for them when it comes to getting to a place of sanity with technology. It's not the whole ball game, but it's a start.

We hope you enjoyed this episode. You can find related resources for this conversation in the episode description. Please leave us a review, and subscribe to us on Apple Podcast, Google Podcast. Tune in Spotify or wherever you get your podcasts. Production assistance [00:47:00] by Anna Harris, Kate Rooni, and Darrell Wiggins. Thanks, as always, to the Hogg Foundation for its support. Just as taking care of ourselves helps us in being there for others. So it is as well that showing up for others helps us strengthen our own resilience. Taking us out now is "Anna's Good Vibes" by my friend Anna Harris. Thanks for joining us.