Raising Kids in a Screen-Filled World: What the Research Says and Tips for PCPs

Presented By Catherine Kent, MD
and Laurel Hoffmann, MD MPH

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Oct 23, 2025

Disclosures

No financial disclosures for

- Catherine Kent, MD

- Laurel Hoffmann, MD MPH

Combined, we have 5 children, so we feel passionate about this topic.

Objectives

- **Evaluate evidence:** Review two articles and apply to patient care

- **AAP** content review

- Tips for **screentime counseling**

- Additional **resources** you should know about

In the end, you will feel more hopeful and confident about screentime counseling in a well child check setting.
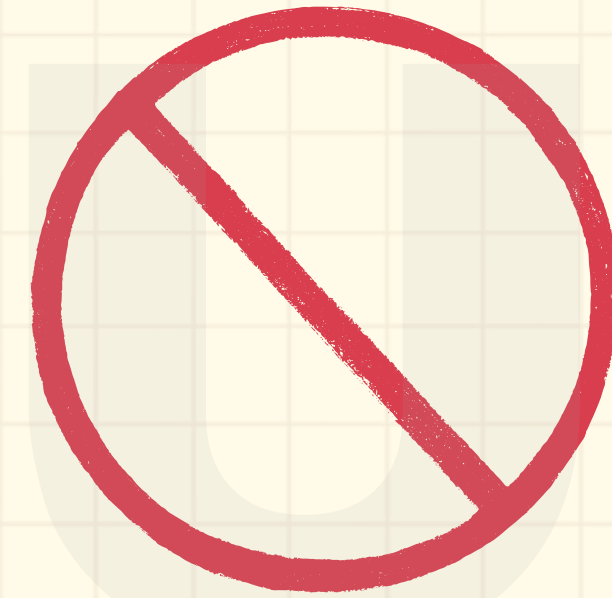
Why this topic

Parents are asking for it

Technology is moving fast

Hot topic

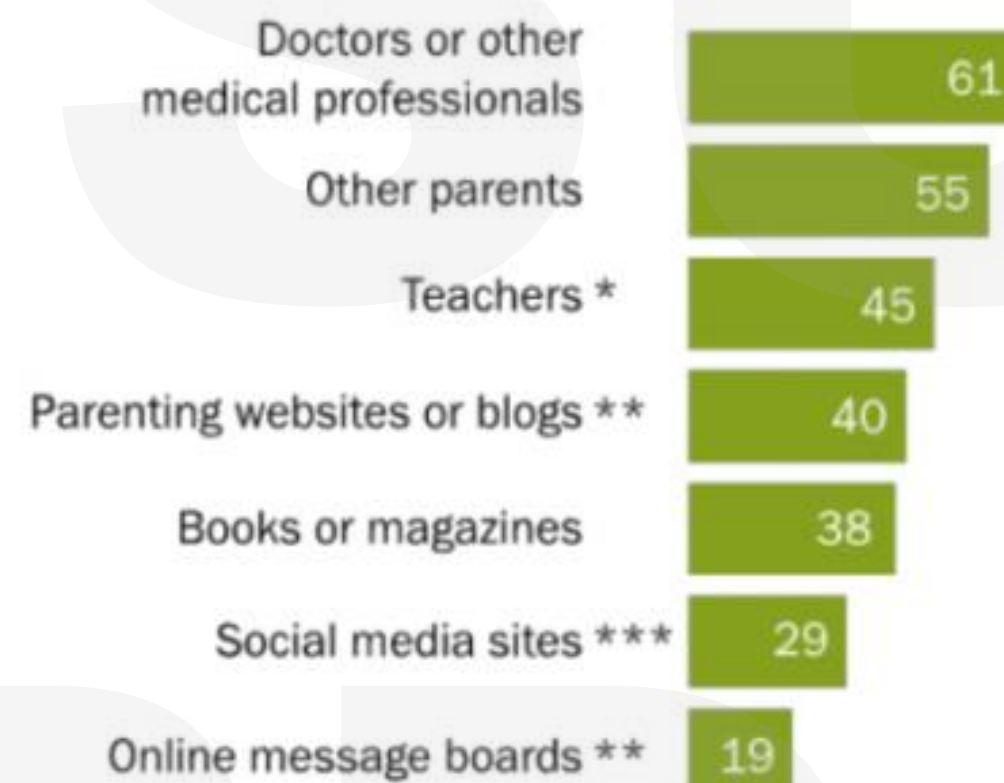# What this is not

Screentime abstinence-only education

Comprehensive problem definition

Neurobiology of screens

A majority of parents are concerned that their child might ever spend too much time on screens and have reached out to doctors for advice about this

% of U.S. parents of a child age 11 or younger who say ...

They ever get **parenting advice or information** about screen time from ...

Doctors or other medical professionals	61
Other parents	55
Teachers *	45
Parenting websites or blogs **	40
Books or magazines	38
Social media sites ***	29
Online message boards **	19

About 4 in 10 parents say they could better manage their kid's screen time

% of U.S. parents of a child age 12 or younger who say they ___ at managing their child's screen time

Could be doing better	Are doing the best they can
42	58

Note: Parents with more than one child age 12 or younger were asked to answer about one randomly selected child and may have children in other age groups. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. parents conducted May 13-26, 2025.
"How Parents Manage Screen Time for Kids"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Pew Research Center = nonpartisan social science research

Governor Kotek Takes Action to Protect Student Mental Health and Increase Student Outcomes

Executive Order 25-09 establishes statewide policy cell phone use in K-12 schools

Office *of the* **U.S. Surgeon General**

Social Media and Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory (Executive Summary)

Social media use among young people is nearly universal, with up to 95% of teenagers, and even 40% of children aged 8-12, on social media.[1,2] Despite this widespread use among children and adolescents, we do not yet have enough evidence to determine if social media use is sufficiently safe for them — especially during adolescence, a particularly vulnerable period of brain development.

STATE OF OREGON

1859

THE UNION

Scenario #1 - WCC older elementary

- 8 and 11 year-old siblings have "outgrown aftercare" and want to walk 5 blocks home from school together and spend afternoons at home.
- They want to be responsible and communicate with parents directly.
- They are asking parents for a phone or a smart watch.
- Parents are conflicted – they want to allow independence but also want to keep kids off screens as much as possible.

- **How should a PCP navigate this discussion with parents?**

- **What evidence and resources should the PCP share with the family?**

11 year-old

8 year-old

Scenario #2 - WCC teens

- Well child checks, 13 and 15yo sibs.
- No concerns stated, but when PCP asks about screens, mom states that kids are on their phones ALL THE TIME.

- Started with time limits and trying to keep phones out of the bedroom, but just "doesn't work." Mom is on her phone frequently for work as well.

- **What are highest yield discussion points for PCP?**

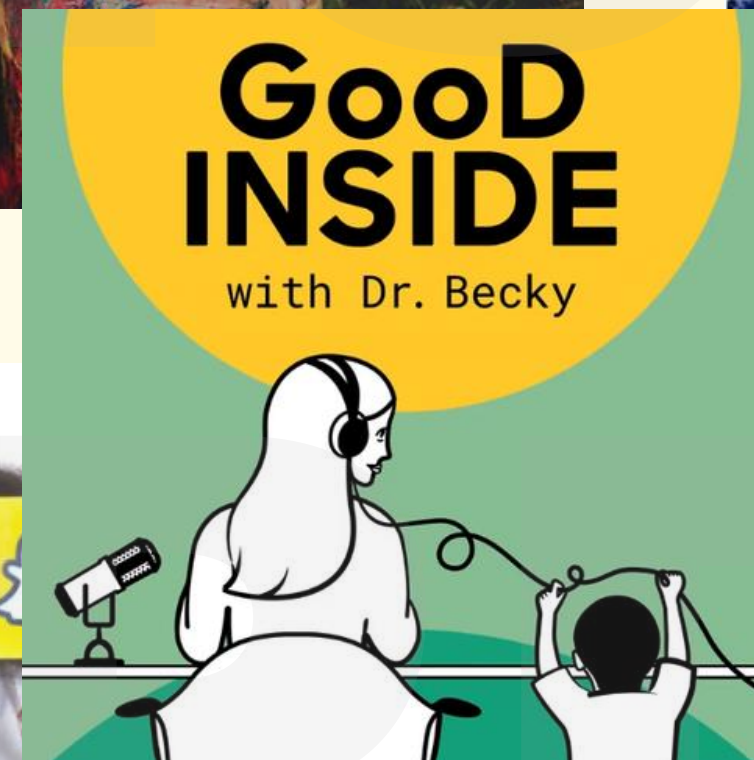- **How long of a discussion does it take to make an impact?**

15 year-old

13 year-old
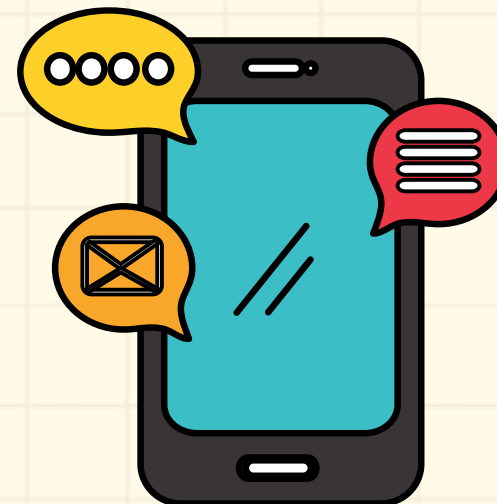
What is a PCP to do?

Objectives

- **Evaluate evidence: Review two articles and apply to patient care**

- AAP content review

- Additional resources you should know about

- Tips for screentime counseling

In the end, you will feel more hopeful and confident about screentime counseling in a well child check setting.

Study 1 - Does Parent Behavior Matter?

J Dev Behav Pediatrics, Jan/Feb 2025

Associations Among Problematic Internet Usage in Adolescents, Parental Internet Factors, and Parent-Adolescent Communication

Libby Matile Milkovich, MD[*], Kimberly A. Randell, MD, MSc[†], Ashley K. Sherman, MA[‡], Megan A. Moreno, MD, MSEd, MPH[§]

ABSTRACT

Objective: Adolescents with problematic internet use (PIU) have excessive, impulsive, or risky internet use that negatively affects social, physical, and functional outcomes. The role of parents in the prevention of adolescent PIU remains unclear. The purpose of this study was to evaluate possible association between adolescent PIU, parent PIU, and internet-related parenting factors.

Methods: Adolescents aged 12 to 18 years and a parent were recruited through national Qualtrics panels for an online cross-sectional survey. Adolescents and parents completed the Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale-3 (PRIUSS-3) and Internet-Specific Parenting Practices (ISPP) scales for (1) internet content (ISPP-content) and (2) time on the internet (ISPP-time). Adolescents completed ISPP for quality of parent communication regarding internet use (ISPP-Quality). Bivariate analyses examined relationships between adolescent PIU, parent PIU, and ISPP.

Results: In total, 4558 adolescents and 4568 parents completed surveys. Adolescent PIU prevalence was 69.9%. Parent PIU prevalence was 61.4%. Among parents with PIU, 87% had an adolescent with PIU compared with only 42% of parents without PIU (OR = 9.54, 95% CI: 8.24–11.05). More lenient content parenting practices and stricter time parenting practices were associated with increased likelihood of adolescent PIU. The quality of parent communication around the internet was lower for adolescents with PIU.

Conclusion: Study findings suggest that coaching around positive parent-child relationships and healthy family internet use habits that include shared digital experiences may more effectively address PIU than enforcing child screen time limits.

Index terms: digital technology, parenting, mobile phone, problematic internet use

# Study 1 - Does Parent Behavior Matter?

- Online cross-sectional survey, national Qualtrics panel

- Feb-April 2019, published Dec 2024 – Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics

- **Problematic Internet Use (PIU)**
  - Internet use that is risky, excessive or impulsive in nature leading to negative consequences, specifically physical, emotional, social or functional impairments.

  - Sleep disorders, poor academic performance, anxiety and depression symptoms are associated with PIU.

Short answer:

YES!

- **Problematic Internet Use (PIU)**

  - Internet use that is **risky, excessive or impulsive** in nature leading to **negative consequences**, specifically physical, emotional, social or functional impairments.

  - Sleep disorders, poor academic performance and anxiety and depression symptoms are associated with PIU.
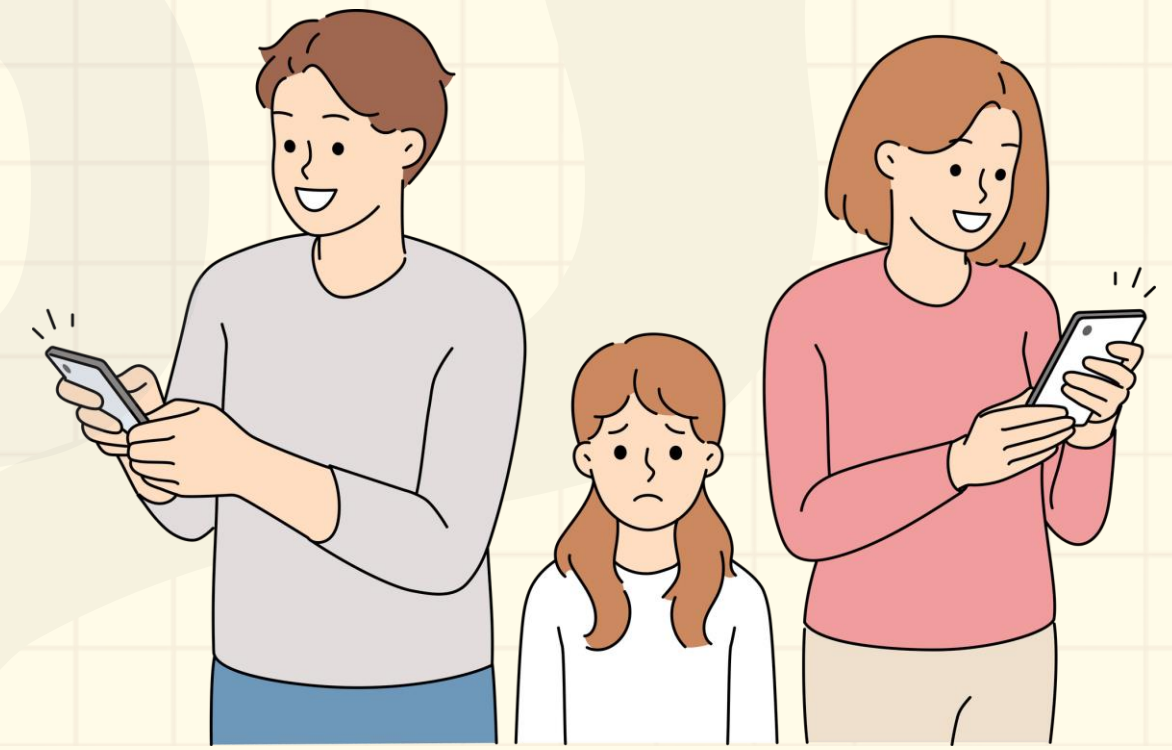
- **Tools** used: Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale Brief **(PRIUSS-3)** and Internet Specific Parenting Practices rating scales. (ISPP – quality and time and content).

The Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale Brief
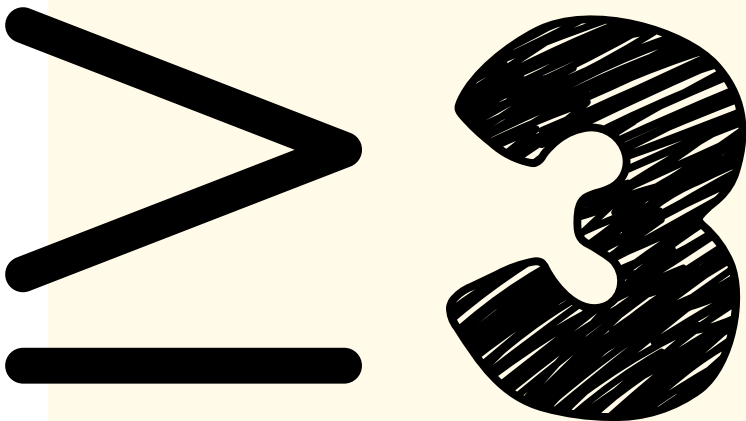
PRIUSS 3

Please answer the questions based on how you have felt and conducted yourself regarding your internet use over the past 6 months. Please do your best to interpret these questions as they apply to your own experiences and feelings.

When considering your internet use time, think about any time you spend online, whether you are using a computer or a mobile device. Do not include time you spend texting unless you are using text messages to interact with an online application.

Place an X in the box which best describes your answer.

| How often do you	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
	0	1	2	3	4
experience increased social anxiety due to your internet use					
feel withdrawal when away from the internet					
lose motivation to do other things that need to get done because of the internet					

Patients with a total score of greater than or equal to 3 on the PRIUSS-3 can then be administered the PRIUSS-18 as a more thorough evaluation.

Study 1 - PRIUSS 3

The Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale Brief

PRIUSS 3

Please answer the questions based on how you have felt and conducted yourself regarding your internet use over the past 6 months. Please do your best to interpret these questions as they apply to your own experiences and feelings.

When considering your internet use time, think about any time you spend online, whether you are using a computer or a mobile device. Do not include time you spend texting unless you are using text messages to interact with an online application.

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How often do you	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
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experience increased social anxiety due to your internet use	X				
feel withdrawal when away from the internet			X		
lose motivation to do other things that need to get done because of the internet				X	

Patients with a total score of greater than or equal to 3 on the PRIUSS-3 can then be administered the PRIUSS-18 as a more thorough evaluation.

≥ 3
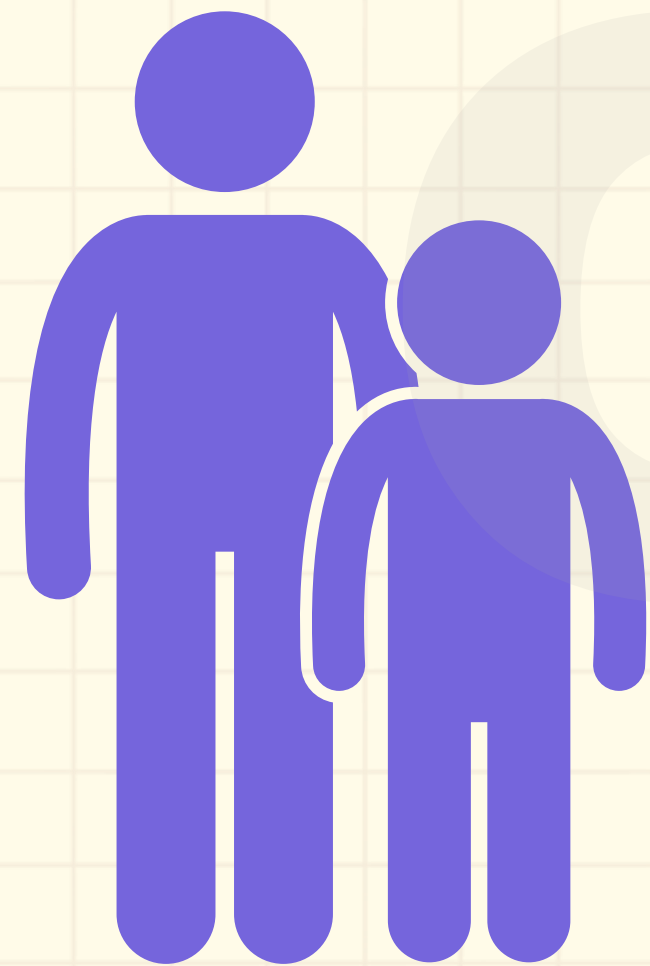
Adolescent PIU = 70%, mean PRIUSS-3 score 4.7

70%
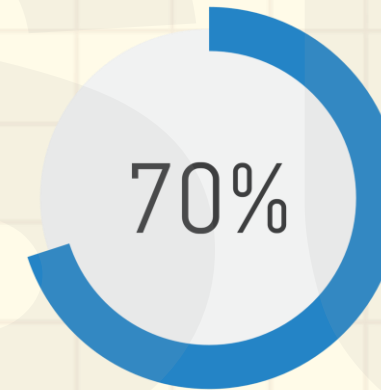
Parent PIU = 61%, mean PRIUSS-3 score 4.1

61%

4550 dyads
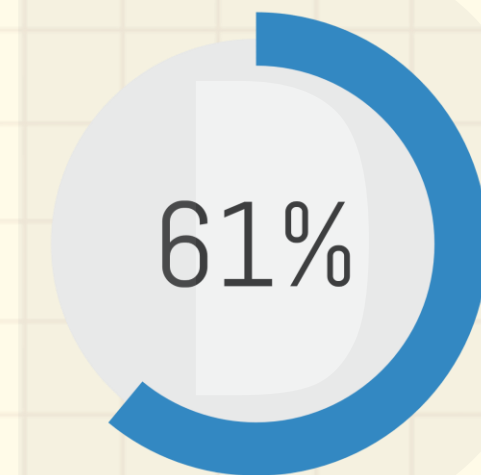
- More **restrictive** practices around **adolescent's time** spent on the internet was asso with slightly higher adolescent PIU.

- Higher adolescent PIU is asso with lower **quality of parent communication** regarding the internet.

Table 2.

Logistic Regression Predictors of Teen PIU

Model	Predictor	Unadjusted OR	95% CI	p
1	Parent at risk for PIU	9.54	8.24–11.05	<0.0001
2	Content parenting practices	0.71	0.67–0.75	<0.0001
3	Time parenting practices	1.11	1.04–1.19	0.003
4	Quality of communication	0.50	0.45–0.54	<0.0001

quality of communication — ISPP- Quality of communication regarding internet use

content limits — ISPP- Rules with regard to content of the internet use

time limits — ISPP- Rules with regard to time spent on the internet

Odds Ratio

Figure 1. Internet Specific Parenting Practices (ISPP) and Adolescent Problematic Internet Use (PIU).

OR = 1= NO association between Y axis variable and adolescent PIU

Odds of having an adolescent with PIU were nearly **10x higher** for parents with PIU compared to parents without PIU (OR 9.54).

More lenient parenting practices around **internet content** and stricter parenting practices around **internet time** (reported by adolescent) were associated with increased likelihood of adolescent PIU.

Study 1 - Key Takeaways

- Setting time limits is **outdated**.

- **Family digital environment** plays a key role in adolescent internet use.
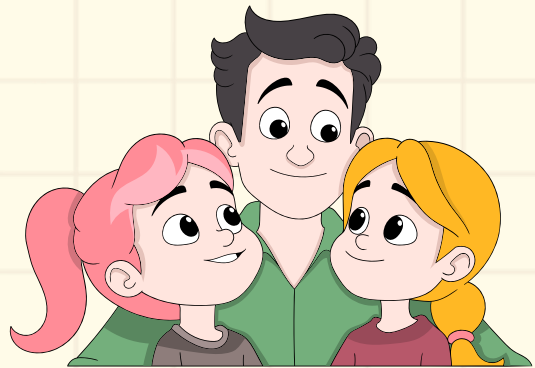
- When counseling re: screentime/internet use, consider impact of **parent internet use habits** and parent-child **relationship** and **communication**.
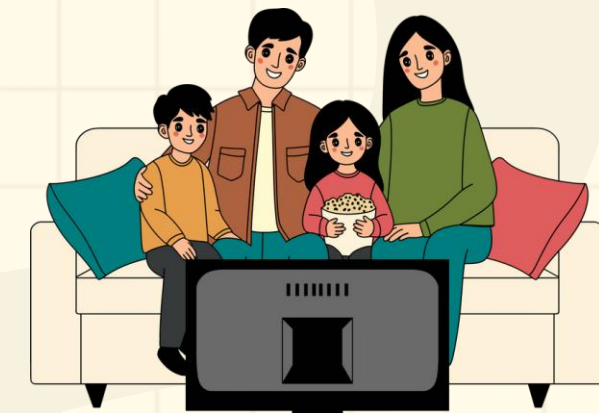
Applying Study #1 to Scenarios

- Parent behavior **DOES** matter but how can we convey that in a non-judgmental way?

- Household environment – where/when are screens for parents and children/teens

- Caregiver communication – conversations about content of media

- Time limits should not be the sole focus

So...What does this look like in a WCC?

Study 2 - How do I counsel families?

Original article

A Cluster Randomized Controlled Trial of a Primary Care Provider-Delivered Social Media Counseling Intervention

Megan A. Moreno, M.D., M.S.Ed., M.P.H. [a,*], Jonathan D. Klein, M.D., M.P.H. [b,c], Kristen Kaseeska, M.P.H. [c], Julie Gorzkowski, M.S.W. [c], Donna Harris, M.A. [d], James Davis, M.D. [d], Edward Gotlieb, M.D. [d], and Richard Wasserman, M.D., M.P.H. [d,e]

[a] Department of Pediatrics, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin, Madison
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[d] Pediatric Research in Office Settings (PROS), American Academy of Pediatrics, Itasca, Illinois
[e] Department of Pediatrics, Larner College of Medicine, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont

Study 2 - Population

Adolescent

Health

in

Pediatric

Practice

Study 2 - Population
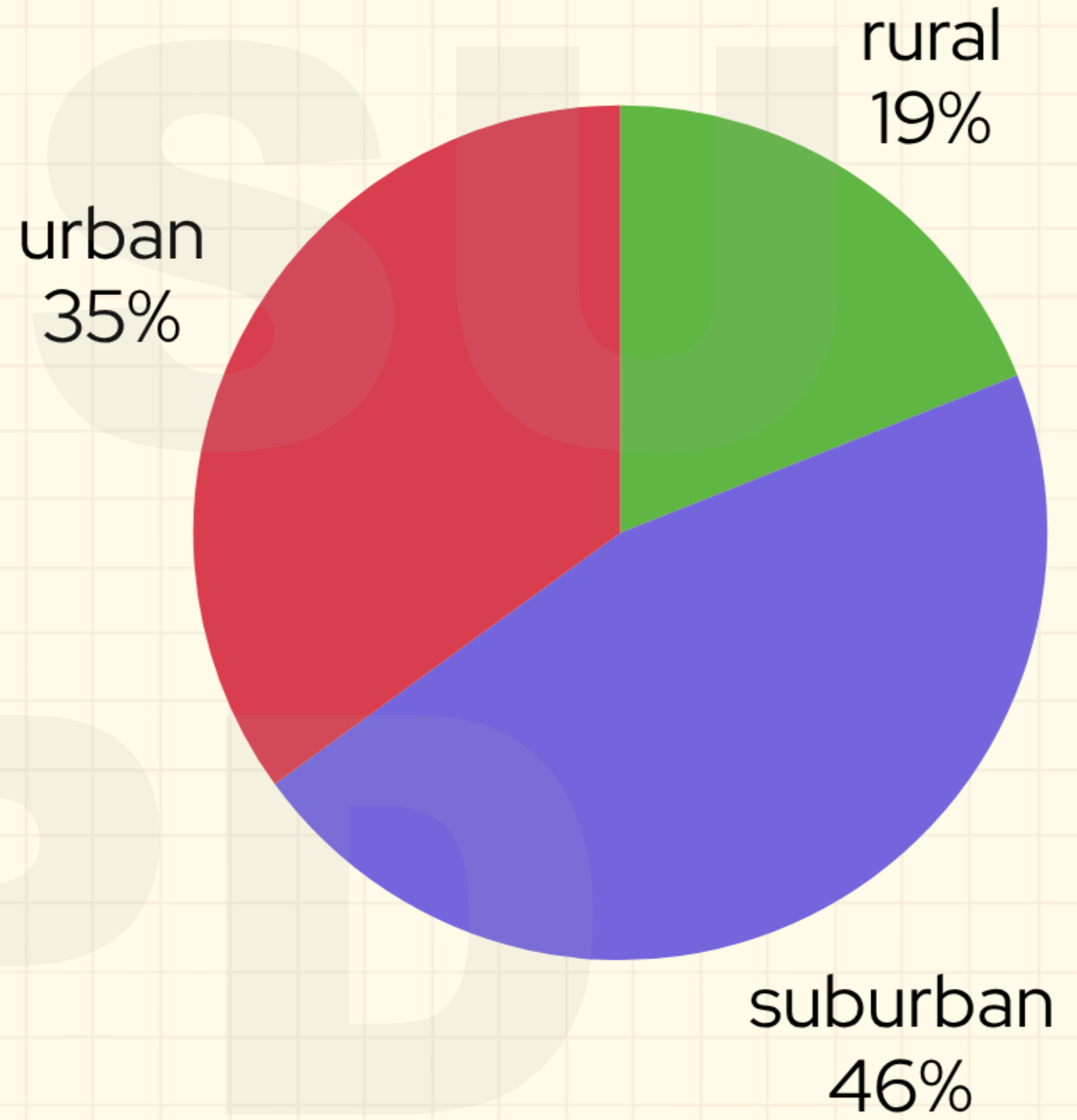
Study 2 - Population

Study 2 - Intervention

Pediatric providers

SCMI
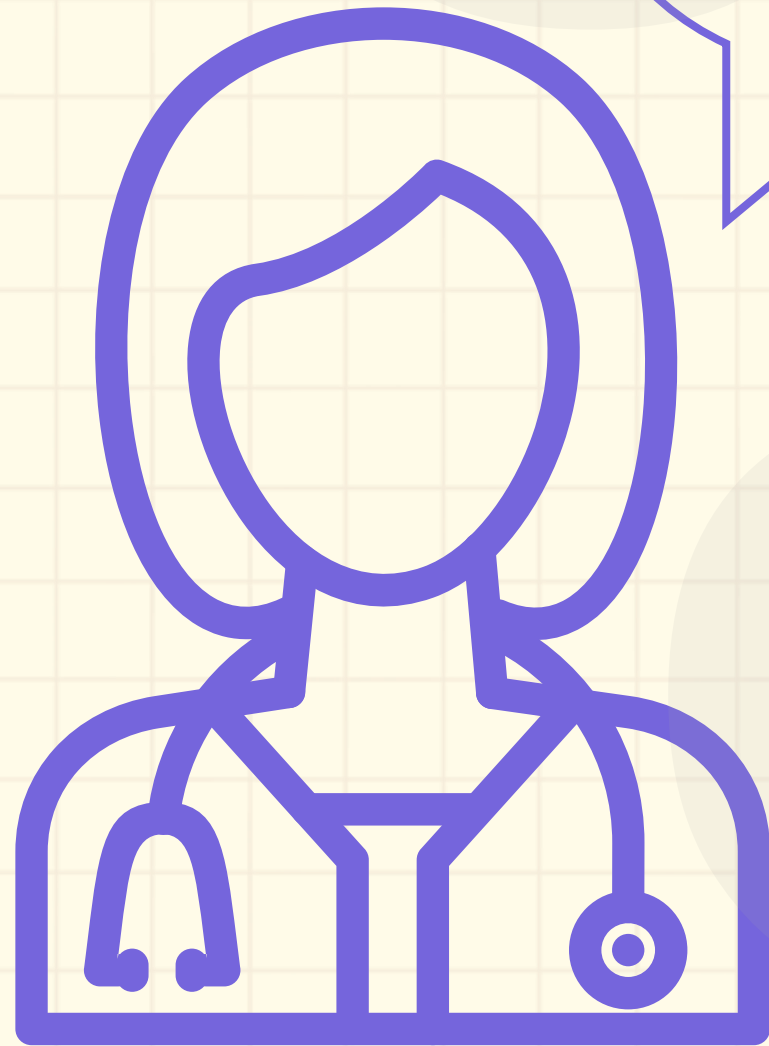
Social Media Counseling Intervention

- 1-3 minute conversation
- Safety brochure for parents
- Youth and pediatrician developed topics
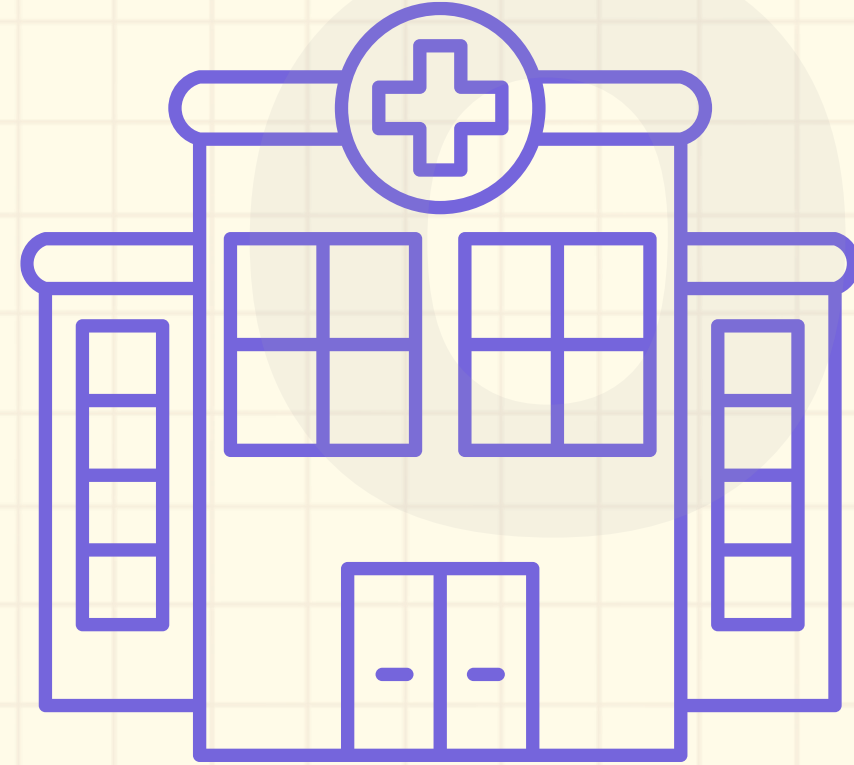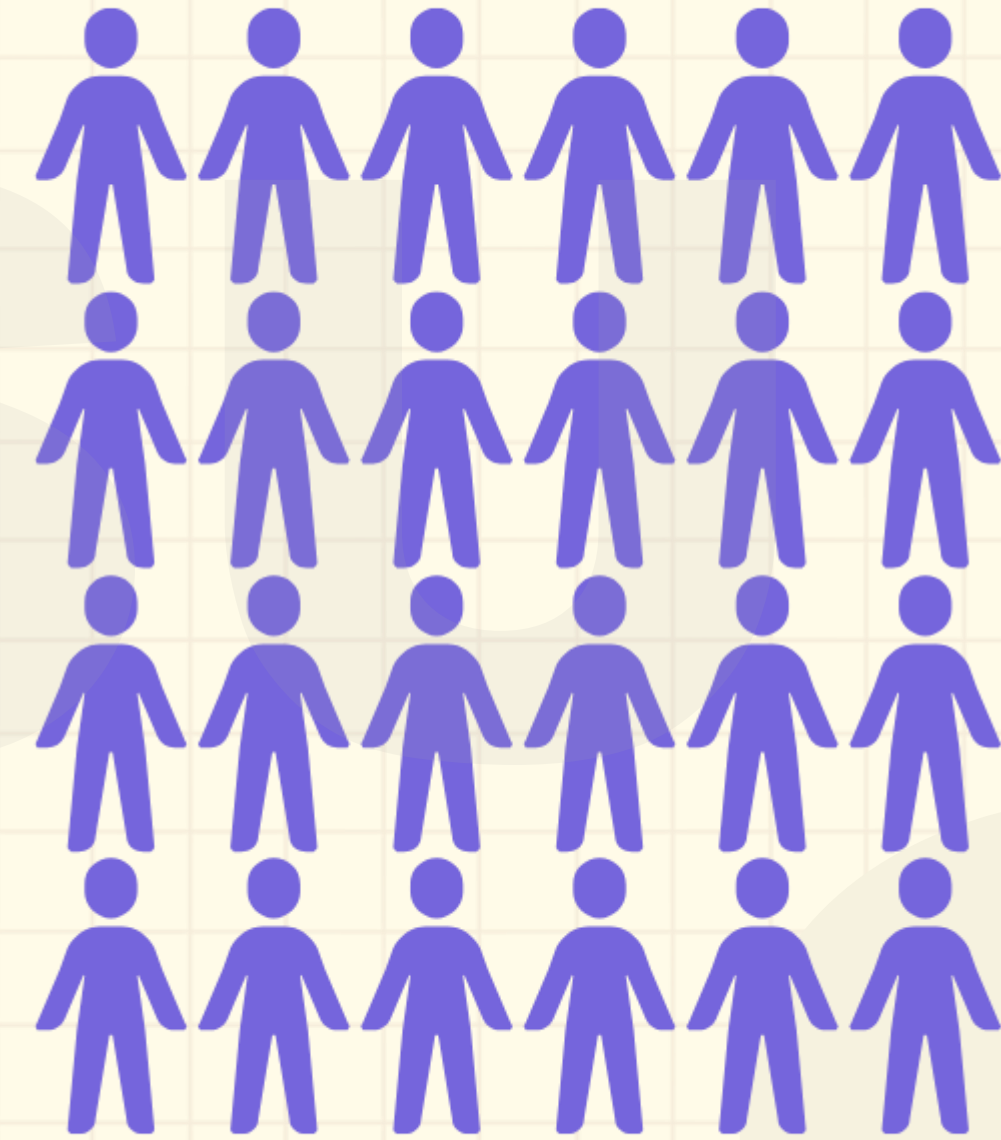
Study 2 - Intervention

Balance

Boundaries

Communication

Study 2 - Cluster

PROS trained
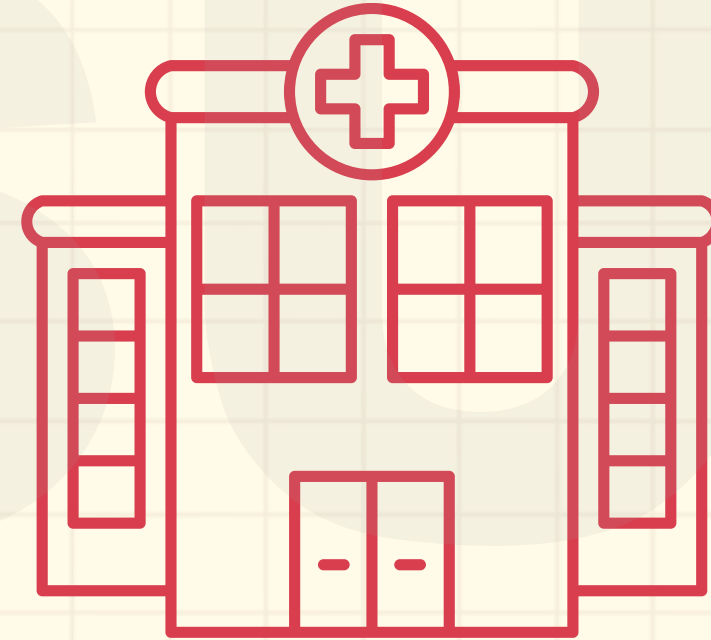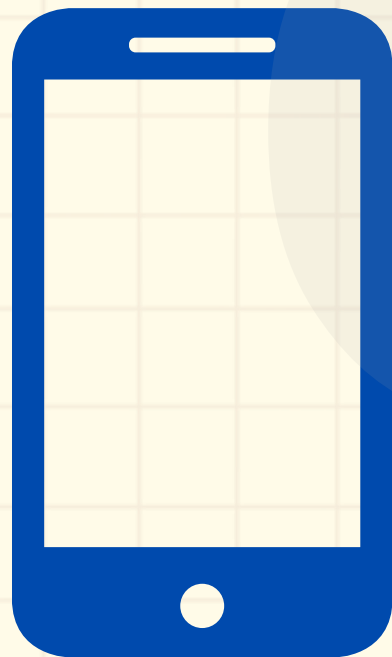
ALL

Pediatric
providers in each clinic

14–25 year-olds

English-speaking

Acute and well
visits

Study 2 - Study Arms

INTERVENTION

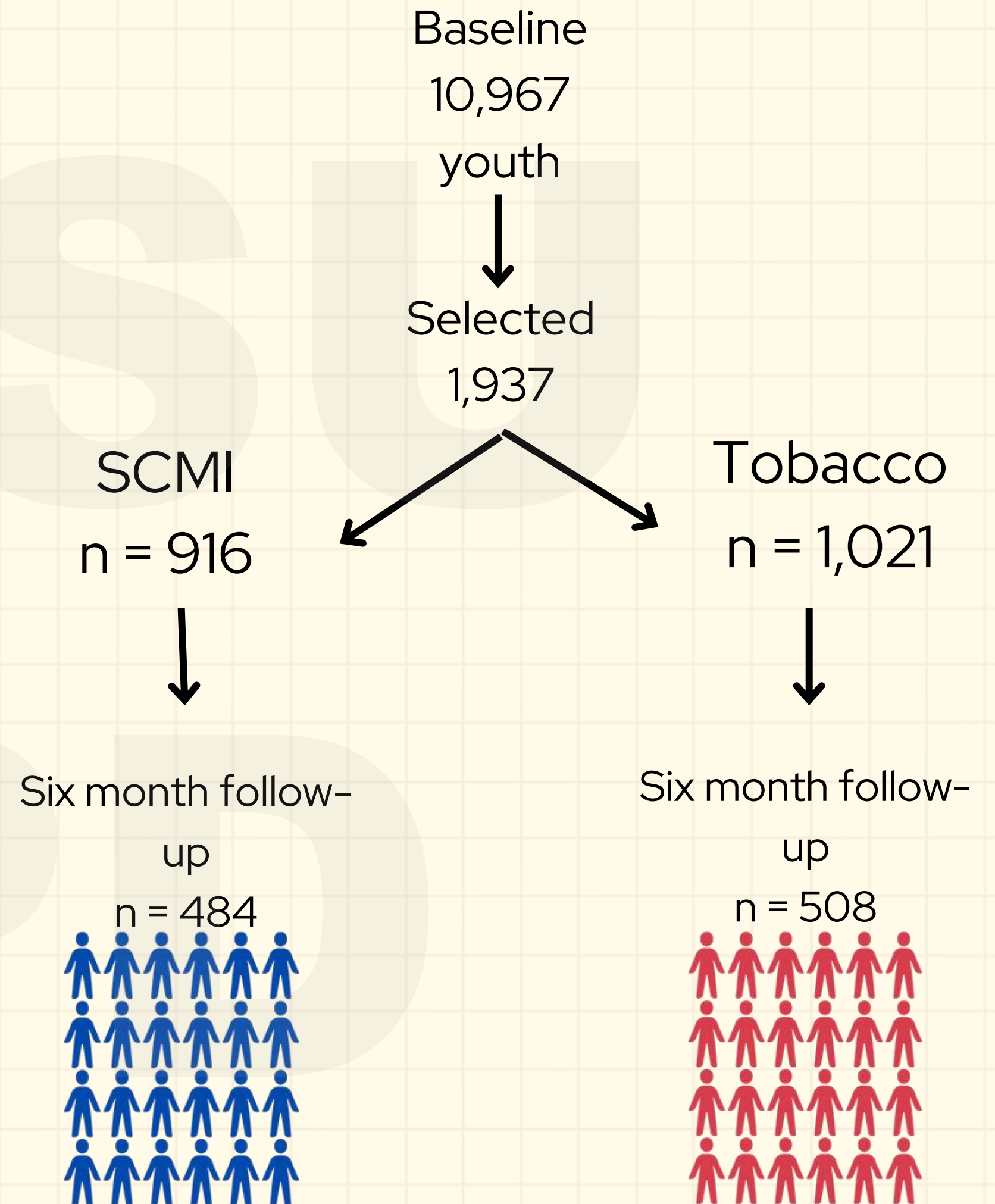Social Media Counseling Intervention

CONTROL

Tobacco Cessation

Study 2 - Outcomes

- Baseline and 6 months
- Phone call
- Self reported behavior
  - General media use
  - Balance
  - Boundaries
  - Communication

Baseline
10,967
youth

↓

Selected
1,937

SCMI
n = 916

Tobacco
n = 1,021

Six month follow-up
n = 484

Six month follow-up
n = 508

Study 2 - Results

- Baseline **3 hours** of social media use in both study arms
  - **No change** at six months

- SCMI arm subjects remembered **2.9 (SD 1.08) topics** of discussion

- Significant changes reported in
  - "Friending" strangers
  - Communication with caregivers
  - Caregivers set rules

Study 2 - Results

Outcomes: Desired behaviors	Odds Ratio (95% CI)
Less "friending" strangers	2.23 [1.17; 4.25]
More communication with caregivers	1.24 [1.10; 1.40]
Caregivers set rules for media use	1.14 [1.00; 1.30]

Study 2 - Results

Outcomes: Desired behaviors	Odds Ratio (95% CI)
Less "friending" strangers	2.23 [1.17; 4.25]
More communication with caregivers	1.24 [1.10; 1.40]
Caregivers set rules for media use	1.14 [1.00; 1.30]

0.5   1   2
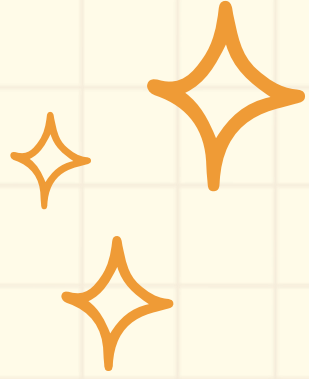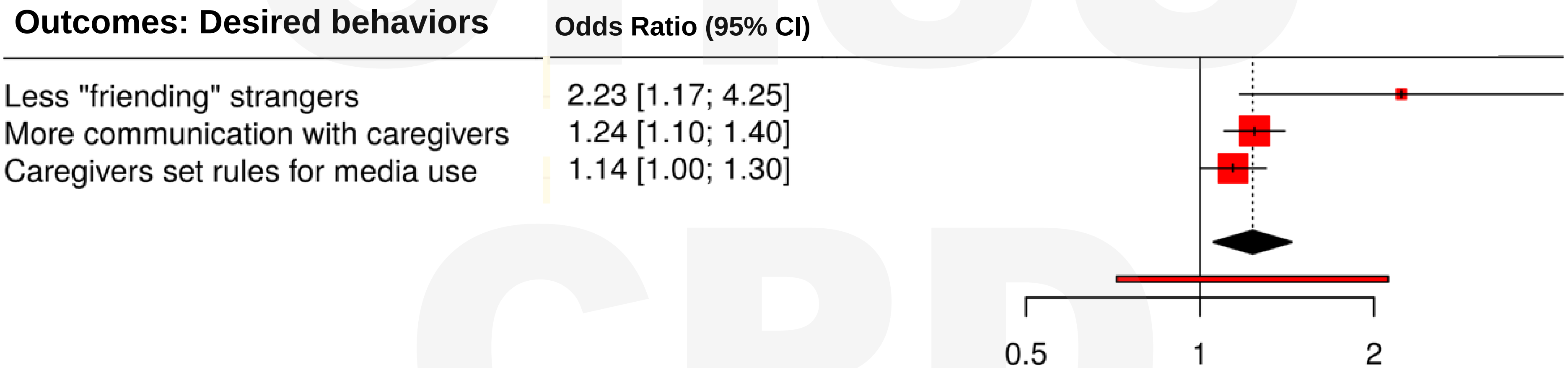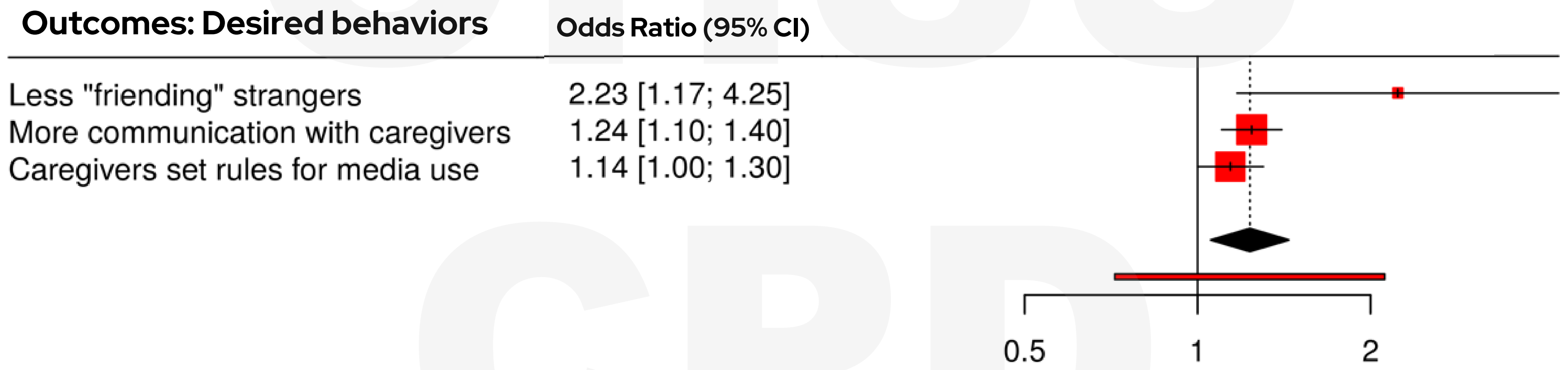
NO association between SCMI and behavior change

Study 2 - Key Takeaways

- **1-3 minute** conversation is sufficient

- **Highest yield topics**:
    - Not "friending" strangers
    - Communication with caregivers
    - Caregivers set rules

Applying Study #2 to Scenarios

PCP interventions should:

- Be reasonable
- Be quick
- **Involve** patients/families!
  - Motivational Interviewing
  - Collaborative Problem Solving
- Pick your **top 2** tips
  - Age specific

Objectives

- Evaluate evidence: Review two articles and apply to patient care

- **AAP content review**

- Additional resources you should know about

- Tips for screentime counseling

In the end, you will feel more hopeful and confident about screentime counseling in a well child check setting.

aap.org/socialmedia

This National Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health will serve as a centralized, trusted source for evidence-based education and technical assistance to support the mental health of children and adolescents as they navigate social media.

More About the Center's Framework

aap.org/socialmedia

Resource Guide for Pediatricians: School Phone Policies

Home / Patient Care / Media and Children / Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health / Resource Guide for Pediatricians: School Phone Policies

New Resources to Help Children Develop Healthy Media Habits

Check out these two new resources designed to help parents have conversations with teens and tweens about technology and digital media, and strategies to help children aged 10 and younger develop healthy relationships with media.

Conversation Starters for Teens

Strategies for Children 10 and Younger

Youth Advisory Panel

Learn about the CoE Youth Advisory Panel (YAP) and read their advice for tech leaders and policymakers, plus answers to teens' top questions about social media and mental health.
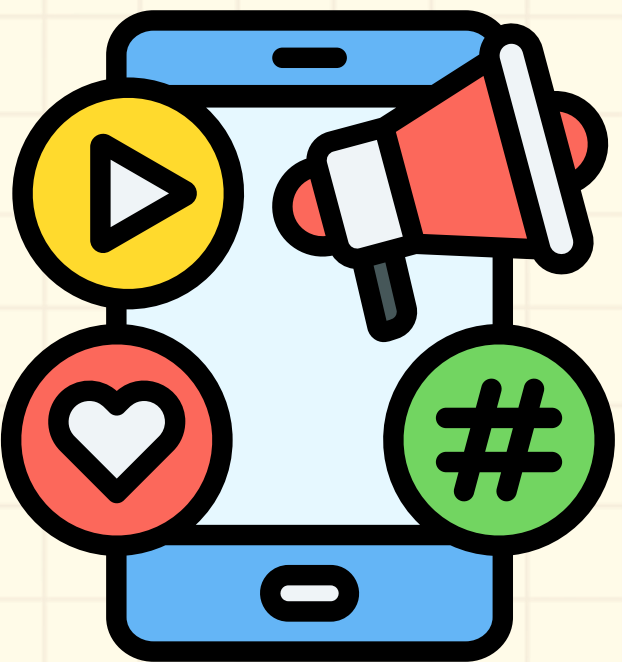
aap.org/socialmedia

Question: *What advice do you have for parents when they say that their child is watching Miss Rachel when the child is under 2? Do we recommend it's okay because it's educational?*

Question: *The issues surrounding social media usage is often referred to as an "addiction." Is social media addiction clinically similar to how we understand addiction to substances like drugs and alcohol?*
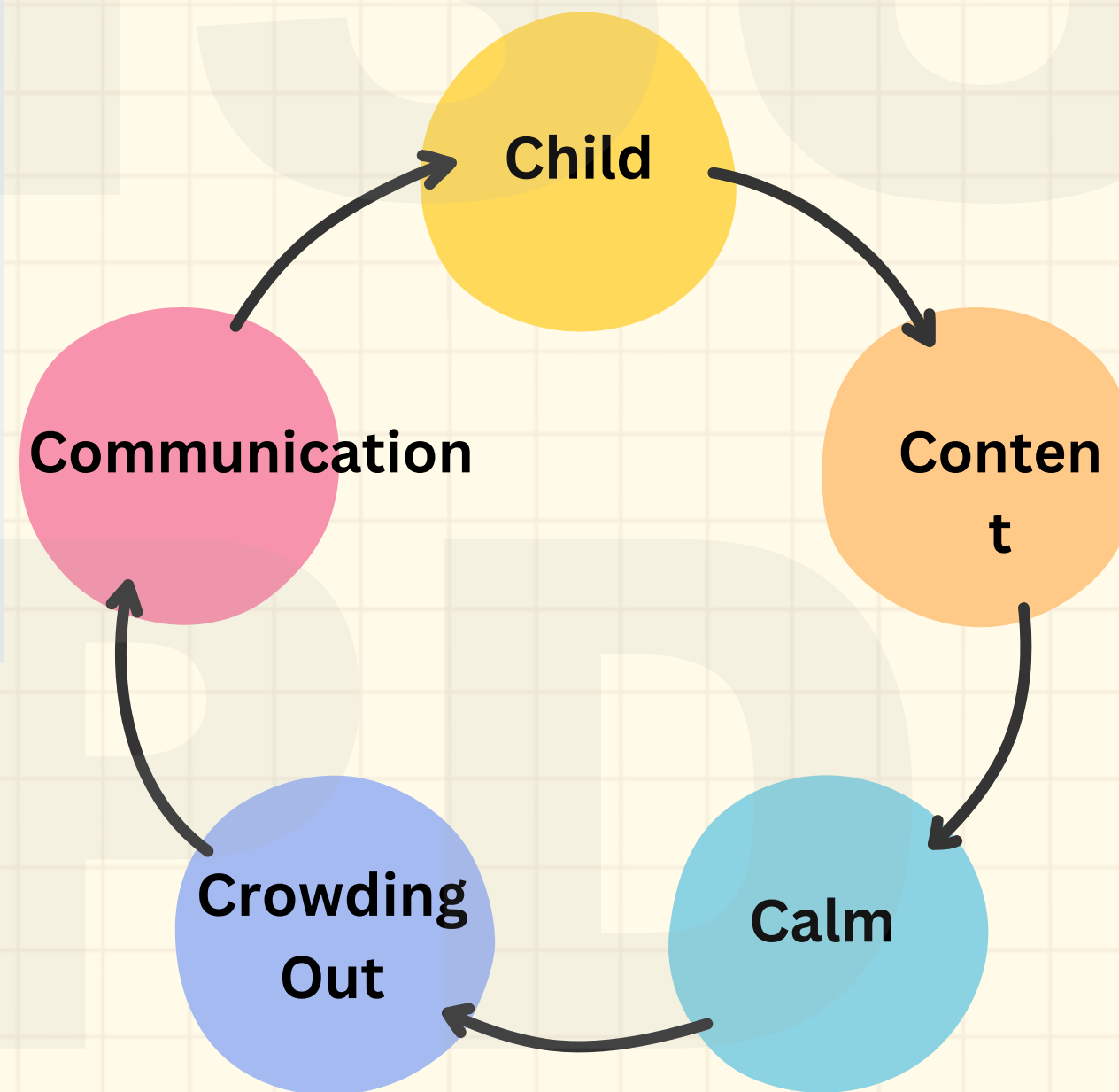
Question: *What do we know about the role of social media challenges and injuries in children? Do we have any evidence-based ways to address these potentially life-threatening social media challenges?*

aap.org/socialmedia

The 5 Cs of Media Use

Pediatricians and providers often need quick, simple ways to discuss digital media with families. To help, we developed The 5 Cs of Media Use. The 5 Cs are designed to meet kids, teens and parents where they are, build insight and communication skills, and motivate for healthy behavior change.

View the 5 Cs

https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/center-of-excellence-on-social-media-and-youth-mental-health/5cs-of-media-use/

Objectives

- Evaluate evidence: Review two articles and apply to patient care

- AAP content review

- **Additional resources you should know about**

- Tips for screentime counseling

In the end, you will feel more hopeful and confident about screentime counseling in a well child check setting.

Let kids be kids a little longer

WAIT UNTIL 8TH

TAKE THE PLEDGE

Oregon

Alameda Elementary School, Astor Elementary School, Beaumont Middle School, Corvallis Waldorf School, French International School of Oregon, Glencoe Elementary School, Harrison Park School, Hayhurst Elementary School, Le Monde French Immersion Public Charter School, Mary Rieke Elementary School, Mary Woodward Elementary School, Oregon Episcopal School, Richmond Elementary School, Riverdale Grade School, Robert Gray Middle School, Sauvie Island Academy, Stephenson Elementary School, Westridge Elementary School.
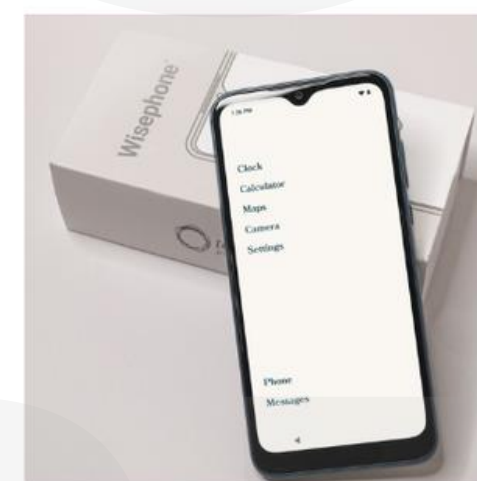
WAIT until 8th

FAMILY CONVERSATION GUIDES

BEST PRACTICES

PARENTAL CONTROLS

Our Family's Phone Plan

Welcome to the Wait Until 8th blog! Here you'll find the latest information and resources on smartphones, social media and all things tech! Don't want to miss a post? Sign up here.

Gives parental control step by step for all of these

AMAZON ECHO

AMAZON FIRE STICK

ANDROID DEVICES

APPLE IPHONE & IPAD

APPLE MACBOOK

APPLE TV

CHROMEBOOK

CHROMECAST

GOOGLE HOME
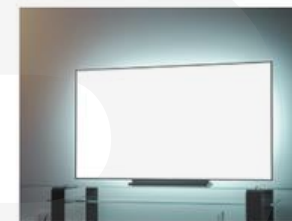
KINDLE FIRE HD

NINTENDO 3DS

NINTENDO SWITCH

PLAYSTATION 4

ROKU & ROKU TV

SMART TVS

WINDOWS (PC)

XBOX GAMING SYSTEM

common sense media®

Get the guidance you need

Become a member to unlock access.

$39.⁹⁹/year SAVE 16% $3.⁹⁹/month

Continue

Family Tech Planners

Use these tech planners to help your kids think through important questions around
tech use: What will I do? How much time will I spend? Am I making thoughtful choices?

Age 2-8

Age 9-12

Age 13+

Age 2–8 Tech Planner

Age 9–12 Tech Planner

Age 13+ Tech Planner

So many options...

Objectives

- Evaluate evidence: Review two articles and apply to patient care

- AAP content review

- Additional resources you should know about

- **Tips for screentime counseling**

In the end, you will feel more hopeful and confident about screentime counseling in a well child check setting.

Scenario #1 - Takeaway Tips

How should a PCP navigate this discussion with families using evidence-based recommendations?

Scenario #1 - Takeaway Tips

- Start a **conversation** rather than focus on an answer

Ask about:

- **Household environment** – where/when are screens for parents and children/teens
- **Parent/child conversations** – early and often
- **Resources**: 5Cs (AAP), Family Phone Plan (Wait Until 8th)

- Mention gently: Parent behavior **DOES** matter

Scenario #2 - Takeaway Tips

- **What are highest yield discussion points for PCP?**

- **How long of a discussion does it take to make an impact?**

Scenario #2 - Takeaway Tips

- **Highest yield topics**:
  - Not "friending" strangers
  - Communication with parents
  - Parents set rules

- Parent behavior **does** matter

- **1-3 minute** conversation can lead to change

In the end, you will feel more **hopeful** and **confident** about screentime counseling in a well child check setting.

Thank you
so much!

References

Milkovich LM, Randell KA, Sherman AK, Moreno MA. Associations Among Problematic Internet Usage in Adolescents, Parental Internet Factors, and Parent-Adolescent Communication. J Dev Behav Pediatr. 2025;46(1):e40-e44. doi:10.1097/DBP.0000000000001328

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Resources

- https://digitalguardians.my.canva.site/

- https://radesky.lab.medicine.umich.edu/news-pubs

- https://www.waituntil8th.org

- https://www.commonsensemedia.org/

- https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/campaigns-and-toolkits/healthy-digital-habits/