



## When to Use the Digital Media Use Screener

Given the increasing role of digital media in adolescent lives, routine screening allows clinicians to proactively identify any potential concerns and provide actionable guidance. The Digital Media Use Screener should be administered as part of the well-child exam for adolescents aged 12-17. It may also be utilized when a parent/caregiver or adolescent expresses concern about digital media use, or when there are signs of difficulties in their daily life.

The screener consists of two key sections:

- 1) Assessing **basic functioning** in five domains known to be impacted by digital media use (questions 1-5):  
1-Sleep, 2-Family Functioning, 3-Friends/Social Functioning, 4-Interests/Activities, 5-Academics
- 2) Examining the **impact of digital media use** on the five basic functioning domains (questions 6-11).

## Suggested Approach

- 1) **Contextualize the screener:** Explain to the patient and their caregiver that this tool is designed to help identify how digital media use may be affecting their daily life.
- 2) **Pair with other social assessments:** Use alongside **HEADSS** or similar social, environmental, and emotional health assessments to identify social determinants of health.
- 3) **Consider mental health conditions:** Patients with ADHD, social anxiety, autism or depression (A-SAD) are much more likely to experience functioning problems related to their digital media use. Evaluate whether these conditions are present and adequately treated, as digital engagement may both reflect and contribute to their challenges.
- 4) **Provide support:** Identify areas for intervention and suggest strategies for healthy digital media use.

## Scoring and Interpretation

The scoring system provides a framework for determining the level of concern and guiding appropriate next steps, from reinforcing healthy habits to identifying areas where additional support may be needed.

**Minimal concern (no “D” or “E” responses in either section):** If responses indicate digital media use is not significantly impairing daily functioning, provide anticipatory guidance by reassuring the parent/caregiver about normative adolescent development and reinforcing healthy, intentional digital habits.

**Potential concern (one or more “D” responses in both sections):** If responses suggest digital media is impacting some areas of basic functioning, explore potential contributing factors (e.g., A-SAD) and discuss digital wellness strategies.

**Significant concern (one or more “E” responses in both sections):** If digital media use appears to be interfering with multiple areas of daily life, prioritize assessment and treatment for underlying mental health conditions (e.g., A-SAD).

## Next Steps Based on Screening Results

- ☐ If score indicates “significant” concern, **assess for A-SAD** and ensure conditions are treated with a focus on digital media use.
- ☐ If “potential” or “significant” concerns are indicated, **provide targeted recommendations** addressing specific functional areas identified in the screener. See [digitalwellnesslab.org/digital-media-use-screener-beta](https://digitalwellnesslab.org/digital-media-use-screener-beta) for resources.
- ☐ If level of concern is beyond your scope of care, **consider referring patient to a behavioral health specialist or specialty clinic** for more extensive evaluation and intervention.
- ☐ Depending on the level of concern, **reassess in 3-6 months** to monitor progress and adjust recommendations as needed.

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*This screener is a beta version and will be refined through ongoing research. It is being made available to provide immediate insights and support in response to clinician demand. If you have questions about how to use this screener, would like to provide feedback or suggestions, or for a referral to the Clinic for Interactive Media and Internet Disorders (CIMAID), please contact us at [dwl@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:dwl@childrens.harvard.edu)*



Please read each of the following statements carefully and select the response that best reflects your experience.

1) I have trouble waking up when I need to be somewhere or do something.

A) Never	B) Rarely	C) Sometimes	D) Often	E) Almost always
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2) When I am at home and family is there, I spend time by myself.

A) Never	B) Rarely	C) Sometimes	D) Often	E) Almost always
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3) I have lost interest in hanging out in person with my friends/peers.

A) Strongly disagree	B) Disagree	C) Neither agree nor disagree	D) Agree	E) Strongly agree
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4) I have lost interest in non-screen activities or hobbies that I used to enjoy.

A) Strongly disagree	B) Disagree	C) Neither agree nor disagree	D) Agree	E) Strongly agree
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5) My grades are...

A) A lot higher than they used to be	B) A little higher than they used to be	C) About the same as they used to be	D) A little lower than they used to be	E) A lot lower than they used to be
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Physician to complete:

1-5:

1-5:

6) I stop using screen media...

A) Before 8pm	B) Between 8pm and 10pm	C) Between 10pm and 12am	D) Between 12am and 2am	E) After 2am
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7) I wake up early to use screen media.

A) Never	B) Rarely	C) Sometimes	D) Often	E) Almost always
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8) I argue/fight with my parents/caregivers about my screen media use.

A) Never	B) Rarely	C) Sometimes	D) Often	E) Almost always
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9) While I am doing homework, I also use my phone, computer, or other screen media to do something else.

A) Never	B) Rarely	C) Sometimes	D) Often	E) Almost always
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10) Compared to my friends/peers, I use screen media...

A) A lot less	B) A little less	C) The same amount	D) A little more	E) A lot more
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11) I prefer to use screen media over any other activity (e.g., sports, hobbies, dance, crafts).

A) Never	B) Rarely	C) Sometimes	D) Often	E) Almost always
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Physician to complete:

6-11:

6-11: