

LIFE ONLINE PARENT PACK

Sensible advice for parents
from Nicola Morgan

NICOLA MORGAN
The Teenage Guide to
Life Online



INTRODUCTION

Many adults struggle to know how best to help their young people (and themselves!) be healthy, safe and successful while still engaging with friends and the wider world on social media and via their screens. We are bombarded with negative headlines and scare stories about this, some of which are contradictory and some of which are based on nothing more than supposition or tiny studies not reflecting the real world. It can be hard to know what we should really worry about, and how much, and how to protect against any genuine risks.

I have put together this free advice for you, based on best evidence and on my existing wide knowledge of the subject.

Who am I? (Because you shouldn't just believe anyone.)

A former teacher and dyslexia specialist, with two postgraduate diplomas in learning difficulties and youth counselling, my understanding of the learning brain has expanded in recent years. Since the 2005 publication of *Blame My Brain – The amazing teenage brain revealed*, I've spoken to audiences in many countries and written several well-received books on teenage well-being, including *The Teenage Guide to Stress*, *The Teenage Guide to Friends* and *Positively Teenage*. I have written classroom materials: *Brain Sticks* and *Stress Well for Schools*. People trust my knowledge and many teenagers appreciate my reassurance, knowledge and support. (Really!)

The research for my latest book, *The Teenage Guide to Life Online*, led to these free resources.

But I have been following the science of screen use long before I started the research for that book, because I am also an expert in aspects of the science of how our brains read, reading for pleasure and the differences between reading in print or on screen. I have a wide understanding of the science of concentration, brain bandwidth, distraction and performance.

Do see my website if you'd like more details: www.nicolamorgan.com

What you'll find in this pack – documents are numbered 1-6 and "LOPP" stands for Life Online Parent Pack:

1. **"INTRODUCTION_LOPP"** – what you're reading now; contains important general points. **It also contains an important link to a Powerpoint presentation on Slideshare.**
2. **"RESOURCES_LOPP" – SCIENCE OF SCREENS, SMARTPHONES AND SOCIAL MEDIA** – a document listing many references to research, books, reports and articles, broken down into topics. This is a really rich set of resources and should help you find the truth (as far as we currently know it) behind the scare-mongering headlines. It should also help you know more than the so-called "digital natives" you care about!
3. **"TIPS_SCREENTIME"** – an A4 sheet of tips for adults and young people. You can print or share this in any way you like*¹.

¹ Copyright © laws apply: you can't sell, alter or claim as your own. Otherwise, I give permission to share freely.

4. **"PLEDGE_LOPP"**, an **ONLINE WELL-BEING PLEDGE** to discuss with your family. When you've talked it through, draw up your own pledge, which might be the same or different.
5. **"PCARD_LIFEONLINE"** – a postcard with four of the best tips I have – you can replicate this in any way you like: print it, share it, embed it in a Powerpoint* etc.
6. **"PCARD_FLOURISH"** – I've added a FLOURISH card, with core principles from my book, **Positively Teenage**.

The Life Online Parent Pack Powerpoint

I have created a Powerpoint for your use. Go here:

<https://www.slideshare.net/NicolaMorgan1961/> and find the presentation called Life Online Parent Pack Powerpoint.

General points

I believe the following things. These are my opinions but based on a vast amount of reading, studying and understanding human behaviour.

1. **Any rules for healthy use should be followed equally by adults and teenagers.** Would you make your child eat lettuce while you ate a chocolate bar? If we say, "You should do this because it is good for you" it undermines the point if we are doing the opposite. (It may be different for young children but this is not about them as that is not my field.)
2. **Since addictive aspects come into play with smartphones (as I explain here: www.nicolamorgan.com/life-online/how-and-why-are-our-screens-so-addictive/), we need to think about this when we set good practice.** For example, if you were trying to eat less chocolate, would you put a chocolate bar in front of you while you worked? No, so don't have a phone in sight either! There are other things we can learn from this idea, as that article explains.
3. **We should try not to set too much store by statistics.** Although statistics inform research and are generally very important, on this topic they are not nearly as important as what you *observe* for you and your young people. For example, regardless of whether over-use of social media *statistically* risks low self-esteem or mental health problems, if you notice this happening to you or your son or daughter, that's what matters. Act on what you observe, not what the headlines tell you.
4. **We must avoid being too negative.** We must recognise the benefits of all the things we can do online. We must *not* say, "Young people are always on their phones!" This is nonsense for two reasons: 1. People of all ages are "always" (ie often) on their phones. 2. "On a phone" includes dozens of activities, some more useful than others.

Practical point

This is a completely free set of resources. If you'd like to buy any of my teenage well-being books (or fiction) or classroom teaching materials, that would be lovely, of course, but entirely your choice! You can buy signed books from my website, order unsigned from any bookshop or online in any of the usual ways. Or you can borrow from a library. Please never download a free version: if it hasn't come directly from me or my publisher, it is an ILLEGAL copy and harms my ability to survive as a writer. The classroom materials – Brain Sticks and Stress Well for Schools – are only available from my website.

Thank you for your interest. If you subscribe to my website (free) you'll get any updates to this material and you'll automatically see articles I write in the future as new research comes along. You're always welcome to contact me through my website.