



TEENS, TECH, CONNECT: HOW TECHNOLOGY IMPACTS TEENAGERS' FRIENDSHIPS

According to the Pew Research Center, 24% of teenagers (ages 13–17) are online “almost constantly” which is facilitated by the proliferation of smartphones. Nearly 75% of teens have access to a smartphone and 30% have a basic phone. These phones and other mobile devices have become a primary driver of teen internet use: 91% of teens go online from mobile devices at least occasionally and teens who don’t access the internet via mobile devices tend to go online less frequently. For the current generation of teens, gaming, video chatting, text messaging and social networking are a vital means of self-expression and a fundamental component of their social lives. Indeed, the digital age has changed—both positively and negatively—the way teenage friendships are formed and maintained.

This lesson provides an opportunity for middle and high school students to explore their current use of and perspective on technology, analyze the results of a recent study on teenagers, technology and friendships, learn more about some of the negative consequences like social isolation and cyberbullying, and share the information they learn with each other.

See these additional ADL resources: *Curriculum Connections* “[Cyberbullying: Understanding and Addressing Online Cruelty](#),” [The ‘Grown Folks’ Guide to Popular Apps in Social Media](#),” *Rosalind’s Classroom Conversations* “[Online Behavior: We’re Just As Bad As We Say Teens Are](#)” and [Cyber-Safety Action Guide](#).

Grade Level: Grades 7–12

Time: 45 minutes

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Speaking and Listening, Language

Learning Objectives:

- Students will explore their experiences with and use of technology.
- Students will reflect on their own points of view about the use of technology and how it impacts their friendships.
- Students will understand more about research that investigates how technology facilitates, in positive and negative ways, teenage friendships.

Compelling Question: How does technology both help and harm teenagers’ friendships?

Material:

- [Teens, Technology and Friendships Report Summary](#) (Pew Research Center), one for each student
- Five individual signs (prepared in advance) that read “6-8am”, “School Day,” “After School,” “7-10pm” and “Weekends”
- *Post-it® Notes* (at least 5 per student)
- Five individual signs (prepared in advance) that read “AGREE,” “STRONGLY AGREE,” “IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE,” “DISAGREE” and “STRONGLY DISAGREE.”

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL’s [“Glossary of Education Terms.”](#))

- authentic
- challenged
- communication
- connections
- consequences
- digital
- drama
- image
- interaction
- maintain
- majority
- smartphone
- social media
- strengthened
- survey
- technology
- venue

TECHNOLOGY IN OUR LIVES

1. Post the five signs (6-8am, school day, after school, 7-10pm and weekends) in different places around the classroom.
2. Explain to students that they are going to think about these different times during the day and their use of technology during each time period. Have students look at the times written around the room and ask: *What types of technology (smartphone, tablet, laptop) or ways you use technology (social media, gaming, internet research) do you use during these different times?* Have students write their responses on the *Post-it® Notes*; they can either write one post-it for each time period or choose more for certain time periods. Share an example if necessary (e.g. “I text before school during the 6am-8am time period”). Give students 3–5 minutes for this task.
3. When students have completed their post-it notes, divide them into small groups of 5–6. Have each group, one at a time, go around the room and post their notes on or near the appropriate time.
4. After all the notes have been posted, read them aloud or have students take turns reading them aloud. Engage students in a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - What do you notice about our use of technology?
 - Are your responses similar to or different from your classmates?
 - Would this have looked different five years ago? How so?
 - What type of technology do you use the most and what do you use it for?
 - In what ways does technology impact your life?

HERE I STAND

1. Explain to students that they will listen to some statements about technology and decide to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement. They will be indicating their opinion about each topic by positioning themselves along an imaginary line, depending upon how strongly they agree or disagree with a statement.
2. Select a large open space and indicate the position of an imaginary line with the farthest right point representing a STRONGLY AGREE response and the farthest left point a STRONGLY DISAGREE response. In between, place AGREE, IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE, and DISAGREE along the continuum. Post the signs you created with these words and hang them up on the wall.
3. Read each statement below, requesting students to take a few minutes to decide where they stand in the continuum, walk silently to that place and observe where others choose to stand.
 - All teenagers should be able to have smart phones.
 - Young people should be able to communicate online with people they don't know.
 - Social media makes friendships better and helps teens get closer to each other.
 - Teenagers often use technology (texting, social media, etc.) to engage in mean behavior and cyberbullying.
 - It is acceptable to break up with someone via text message.
 - Teens feel pressure to post popular and/or flattering information about themselves.
4. After finding their place, have students take a few minutes to talk amongst themselves about why they chose to stand in that place. Time permitting, you can also have one person in each group share their reason for standing where they did.
5. After the activity, engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Was it easy or difficult to decide where to stand?
 - Were some statements easier to decide and some more difficult?
 - How did it feel when most people had the same response as you?
 - How about when most people were standing somewhere else?
 - Did you ever feel you needed to explain where you chose to stand? If so, why did you feel this way?
 - What did you learn from this activity?

READING ACTIVITY: JIGSAW

1. Explain to students that they will read and discuss different parts of a Pew Research Center summary report by using a jigsaw strategy. The jigsaw strategy provides an opportunity for students to learn about different aspects of a topic and then teach each other.
2. Divide up the [Teens, Technology and Friendships](#) Pew summary report according to the following sections or as you see fit.
 - #1: "Friendships can start digitally..." and "Text messaging is a key component..."
 - #2: "Video games...and maintenance of boys' friendships"
 - #3: "Teen friendships are strengthened and challenged within social media environments"

#4: "Teens spend time with their closest friends.... Texting plays a crucial role..."

#5: "Smartphone users...practices for communicating with close friends"

3. To manage the jigsaw, have students count off by 5s (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and so on). Distribute to each student a different section of the report according to their number (all 1s get section #1, all 2s get section #2, etc.). Instruct students to take 5–10 minutes to read their sections silently.

NOTE: If you have time and want to make the lesson more in depth, you may also distribute the corresponding sections of the full report, [Teens, Technology and Friendships](#), to the appropriate group members and allow them additional time to read those sections.

4. After reading their assigned sections, divide students into small groups so that each group has someone who read a different section of the report (i.e. each group will have a person that read sections 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). When the groups are formed, give each student 2–3 minutes to explain what they read, the information and the point of view represented in their article.
5. After the small group sharing and discussion, reconvene the group and engage them in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Was it easy or difficult to summarize the information in your article and share with others?
 - What new information did you learn about the Pew report on teens, technology and friendships?
 - What did you learn from the study that rings true from your own experiences with technology and friendship? And what does not ring true?
 - How has your perspective about technology and friendships changed as a result of learning this new information?

CLOSING

Write these three questions on the board/smart board and have students do a go-round in which they respond to each question. If you are limited with time, have each student answer only one question of their choosing:

- What was the most surprising fact you learned about teens, technology and friendship?
- What was the least surprising fact you learned about teens, technology and friendship?
- What should I/other teens do differently based on learning this information?

SUGGESTED EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Have students work in pairs or small groups to create their own surveys about cyberbullying. First they will need to research the topic and find out what data already exists. Then they will come up with survey questions, design the survey, either using [Survey Monkey](#) to do an electronic survey or by creating a paper survey. Explain that they can either use similar questions to what they learned from other research about cyberbullying or they can come up with new questions based on what they want to know. After creating the survey, have them develop a promotion plan to get their friends and classmates to take the survey and then compile the information and share it with the class and possibly the school community.

- Using the results from the Pew Research Center study or from their own cyberbullying survey if they implemented one, have students create an infographic as an engaging way to share data. Have them think through the most important data they want to include, what graphics they might use, whether they will use online images or create their own and then put it all together. Here is a sample infographic on [Bullying and Cyberbullying](#).
- Have students interview their parents or an adult family member in order to gain insight into how friendships have changed over the years, especially given the growth of technology and social media. They can develop a series of questions as a group and then conduct the interviews and write them up in essay form or create a class blog that includes photos of the person interviewed.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“5 Myths About Teens and Technology Every Parent Should Ignore”](#) (*The Huffington Post*, February 2, 2014)
- *It’s Complicated: The Social Life of Networked Teens* by Dana Boyd
- [Teenagers & Technology with Relationships](#) (Teen Ink)
- [Teens, Social Media & Technology Overview 2015](#) (Pew Research Center)
- [Teens, Technology and Friendships](#) (Pew Research Center)
- [“Teens Use Tech To Build Relationships, Not Destroy Them”](#) (*The Huffington Post*, August 7, 2015)
- [“What Teachers Need to Know About ‘Networked’ Teens ”](#) (*Education Week*, April 1, 2014)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners building on other’s ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
Standard 4: Present information, findings and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.
Language
Standard 4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

TEENS, TECHNOLOGY AND FRIENDSHIPS

SUMMARY

By Amanda Lenhart

Reprinted by permission from Amanda Lenhart, Aaron Smith, Monica Anderson, Maeve Duggan and Andrew Perrin, "Teens, Technology and Friendships" (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2015), <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/>.

This report explores the new contours of friendship in the digital age. It covers the results of a national survey of teens ages 13 to 17; throughout the report, the word "teens" refers to those in that age bracket, unless otherwise specified. The survey was conducted online from Sept. 25 through Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10 through March 16, 2015, and 16 online and in-person focus groups with teens were conducted in April 2014 and November 2014.

For today's teens, friendships can start digitally: 57% of teens have met a new friend online. Social media and online gameplay are the most common digital venues for meeting friends

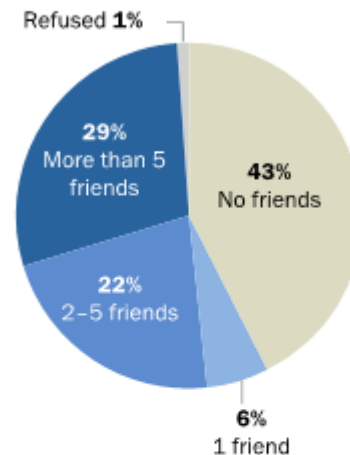
For American teens, making friends isn't just confined to the school yard, playing field or neighborhood – many are making new friends online. Fully 57% of teens ages 13 to 17 have made a new friend online, with 29% of teens indicating that they have made more than five new friends in online venues. Most of these friendships stay in the digital space; only 20% of all teens have met an online friend in person.

- Boys are more likely than girls to make online friends: 61% of boys compared to 52% of girls have done so.
- Older teens are also more likely than younger teens to make online friends. Some 60% of teens ages 15 to 17 have met a friend online, compared with 51% of 13- to 14-year-olds.

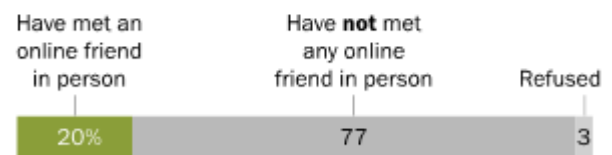
The most common spots for meeting friends online are social media sites like Facebook or Instagram (64% of teens who have made a friend online met someone via social media), followed by playing networked video games (36%). Girls who have met new friends online are more likely to meet them via social media (78% vs. 52% of boys), while boys are substantially more likely to meet new friends while playing games online (57% vs. 13% of girls).

57% of All Teens Have Made New Friends Online

% of all teens who have made ___ friends online



% of all teens who ...



Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015 (n=1,060 teens ages 13 to 17).

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Text messaging is a key component of day-to-day friend interactions: 55% of teens spend time every day texting with friends

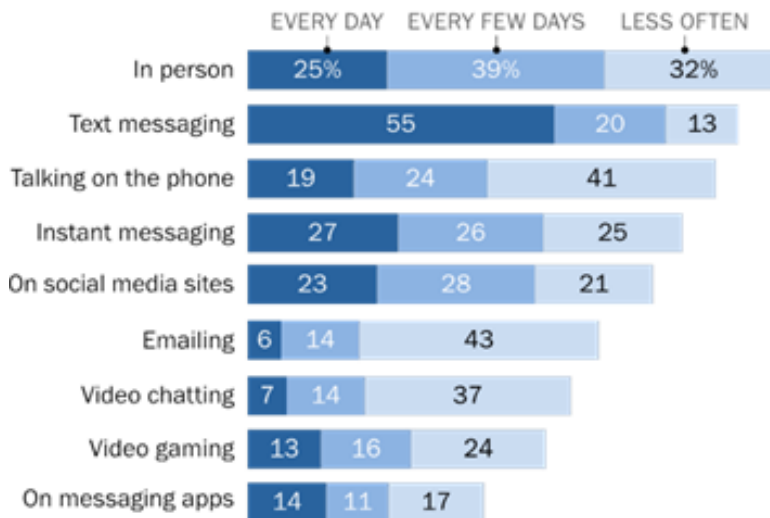
The vast majority of teens (95%) spend time with their friends outside of school, in person, at least occasionally. But for most teens, this is not an everyday occurrence. Just 25% of teens spend time with friends in person (outside of school) on a daily basis.

For many teens, texting is the dominant way that they communicate on a day-to-day basis with their friends. Some 88% of teens text their friends at least occasionally, and fully 55% do so daily. Along with texting, teens are incorporating a number of other devices, communication platforms and online venues into their interactions with friends, including:

- **Instant messaging:** 79% of all teens instant message their friends; 27% do so daily.
- **Social media:** 72% of all teens spend time with friends via social media; 23% do so daily.
- **Email:** 64% of all teens use email with friends; 6% do so daily.
- **Video chat:** 59% of all teens video chat with their friends; 7% video chat with friends daily.
- **Video games:** 52% of all teens spend time with friends playing video games; 13% play with friends daily.
- **Messaging apps:** 42% of all teens spend time with friends on messaging apps such as Kik and WhatsApp; 14% do so every day.

More Than Half of Teens Text With Friends Daily

% of all teens who spend time with friends...



Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015. (n=1060 teens ages 13 to 17.)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Video games play a critical role in the development and maintenance of boys' friendships

Overall, 72% of teens ages 13 to 17 play video games on a computer, game console or portable device. Fully 84% of boys play video games, significantly higher than the 59% of girls who play games. Playing video games is not necessarily a solitary activity; teens frequently play video games with others. Teen gamers play games with others in person (83%) and online (75%), and they play games with friends they know in person (89%) and friends they know only online (54%). They also play online with others who are not friends (52%). With so much game-playing with other people, video gameplay, particularly over online networks, is an important activity through which boys form and maintain friendships with others:

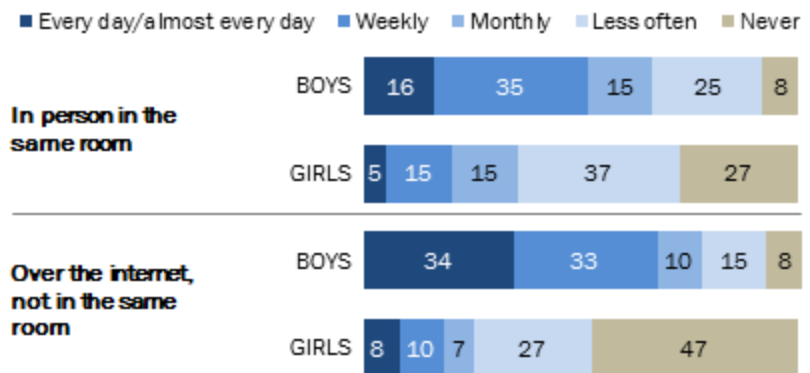
- 38% of all teen boys share their gaming handle as one of the first three pieces of information exchanged when they meet someone they would like to be friends with; just 7% of girls share a gaming handle when meeting new friends.
- Of teens who have met a friend online, 57% of boys have made a friend playing video games. That amounts to 34% of all teenage boys ages 13 to 17.

Much more than for girls, boys use video games as a way to spend time and engage in day-to-day interactions with their peers and friends. These interactions occur in face-to-face settings, as well as in networked gaming environments:

- 16% of boy gamers play in person with friends on a daily or near-daily basis, and an additional 35% do so weekly. That amounts to 42% of all teen boys ages 13 to 17.
- 34% of boy gamers play over the internet with friends on a daily or near-daily basis, and another 33% do so weekly. That amounts to 55% of all teen boys ages 13 to 17.

Gaming Boys Play Games in Person or Online With Friends More Frequently Than Gaming Girls

% of teen gamers who play with people ... by gender



Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015. (n=761 teens who play video games).

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When playing games with others online, many teen gamers (especially boys) connect with their fellow players via voice connections in order to engage in collaboration, conversation and trash-talking. Among boys who play games with others online, fully 71% use voice connections to engage with other players (this compares with just 28% of girls who play in networked environments).

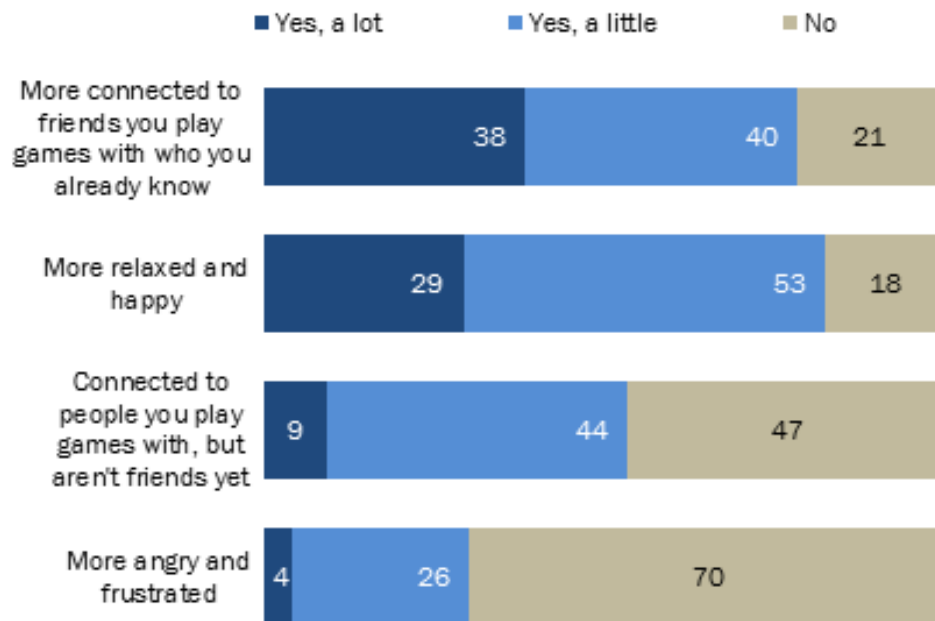
All this playing, hanging out and talking while playing games leads many teens to feel closer to friends.

- 78% of teen online gamers say when they play games online it makes them feel more connected to friends they already know. That amounts to 42% of all teens ages 13 to 17.
- 52% of online-gaming teens feel more connected to other gamers (whom they do not consider friends) they play with online. That amounts to 28% of all teens ages 13 to 17.

- Gaming boys are more likely than girls to report feeling more connected to other networked gamers.
 - 84% of networked-gaming boys feel more connected to friends when they play online, compared with 62% of girls.
 - 56% of boy gamers feel more connected to people they play networked games with who are not friends, as do 43% of gaming girls.

Online Gaming Builds Stronger Connections Between Friends

% of teens who play online with others and feel...



Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015. (n=567 teens who play games with people online).

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Teen friendships are strengthened and challenged within social media environments

Social media also plays a critical role in introducing teens to new friends and connecting them to their existing friend networks. Some 76% of teens ages 13 to 17 use social media and:

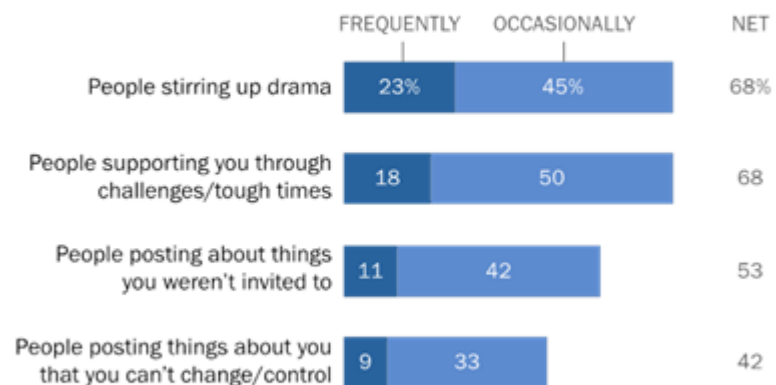
- 64% of teens who have met at least one new friend online report meeting a friend through social media.
- 62% of teens share their social media username as one of the first pieces of information they share as a way to stay in touch when they meet a brand new friend.
- 72% of all teens say they spend time with friends on social media; 23% say they do so every day.

Social media helps teens feel more connected to their friends' feelings and daily lives, and also offers teens a place to receive support from others during challenging times.

- 83% of teen social media users say social media makes them feel more connected to information about their friends' lives.
- 70% of social media-using teens feel better connected to their friends' feelings through social media.
- 68% of teen social media users have had people on the platforms supporting them through tough or challenging times.

From Drama to Support, Teens See a Wide Range of Actions on Social Media

% of teen social media users who ever experience the following on social media



Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015. (n=789 teens who use social media.)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

But even as social media connects teens to friends' feelings and experiences, the sharing that occurs on these platforms can have negative consequences. Sharing can veer into oversharing. Teens can learn about events and activities to which they weren't invited, and the highly curated lives of teens' social media connections can lead them to make negative comparisons with their own lives:

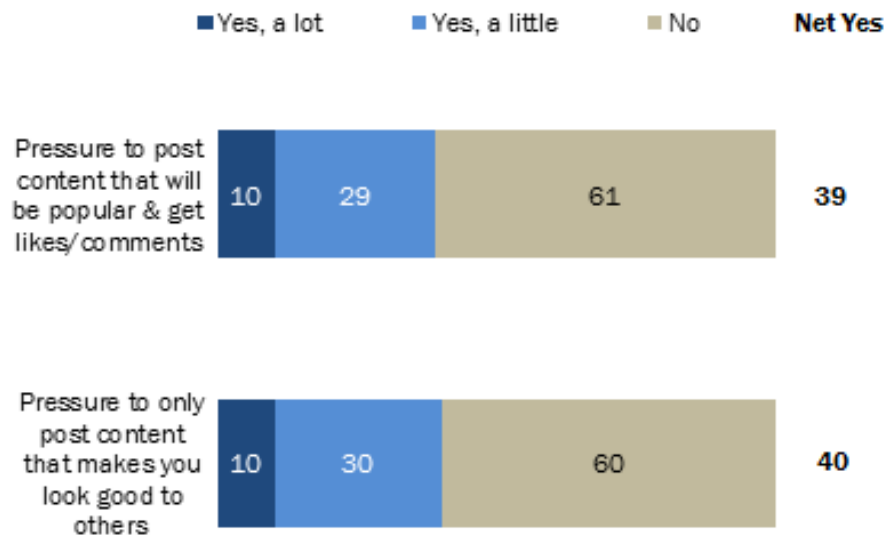
- 88% of teen social media users believe people share too much information about themselves on social media.
- 53% of social media-using teens have seen people posting to social media about events to which they were not invited.
- 42% of social media-using teens have had someone post things on social media about them that they cannot change or control.
- 21% of teen social media users report feeling worse about their own life because of what they see from other friends on social media.

Teens face challenges trying to construct an appropriate and authentic online persona for multiple audiences, including adults and peers. Consequently, many teens feel obligated to project an attractive and popular image through their social media postings.

- 40% of teen social media users report feeling pressure to post only content that makes them look good to others.
- 39% of teens on social media say they feel pressure to post content that will be popular and get lots of comments or likes.

Some Teens Face Pressure to Post Popular or Flattering Content

% of social media using teens who say social media makes them feel the following ways



Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015. (n=789 teens who use social media.)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Some conflict teens experience is instigated online

- 68% of teen social media users (52% of all teens) have experienced drama among their friends on social media.
- 26% of all teens have had a conflict with a friend over something that happened online or over text messages.

Girls are more likely to unfriend, unfollow and block former friends

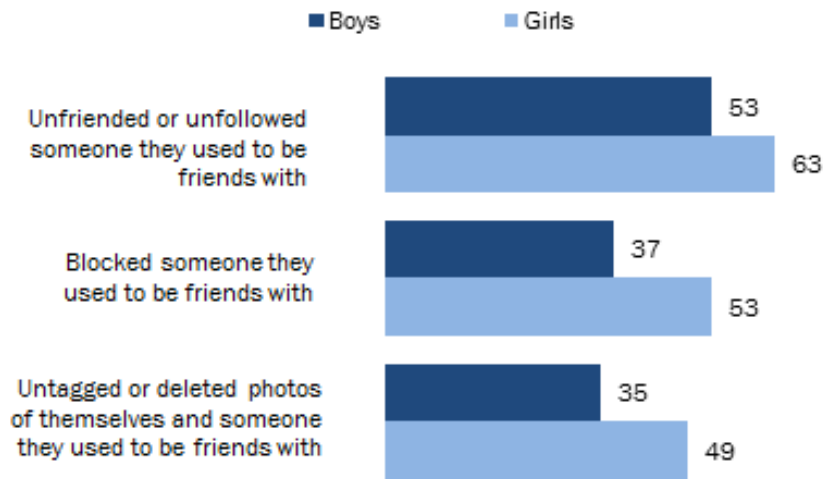
When friendships end, many teens take steps to cut the digital web that connects them to their former friend. Girls who use social media or cellphones are more likely to prune old content and connections:

- 58% of teens who use social media or cellphones have unfriended or unfollowed someone they used to be friends with, and 45% of teens have blocked an ex-friend.
- 63% of girls who use social media or cellphones have unfriended or unfollowed an ex-friend, compared with 53% of boys.

53% of social media- or cellphone-using girls have blocked someone after ending a friendship, compared with 37% of boys.

After a Friendship Ends, Girls More Likely Than Boys to Take Steps to Unfriend, Block or Untag Photos of Former Friends

% of teens who use social media or cellphones who have done the following



Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015. (n=995 teens who use social media or cellphones.)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Teens spend time with their closest friends in a range of venues. Texting plays a crucial role in helping close friends stay in touch

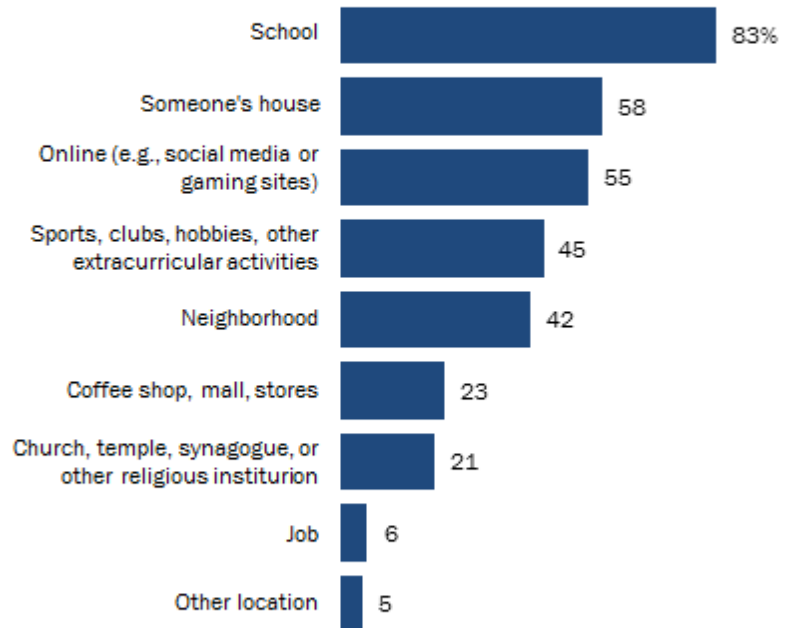
Along with examining the general ways in which teens interact and communicate with their friends, this report documents how and where teens interact with the friends who are closest to them. These “close friend” relationships loom large in the day-to-day social activities of teens’ lives, as 59% of teens are in touch with their closest friend on a daily basis (with 41% indicating that they get in touch “many times a day”).

School is the primary place teens interact with their closest friends. However, these best-friend interactions occur across a wide range of online and offline venues:

- 83% of teens spend time with their closest friend at school.
- 58% spend time with their closest friend at someone’s house.
- 55% spend time with their closest friend online (such as on social media sites or gaming sites or servers).

School, Someone’s House and Online Platforms Are Top Places Where Teens Hang Out With Close Friends

% of teens who regularly spend time with their closest friend at the following locations



Source: Pew Research Center Teen Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015. (n=1,009 teens with a close friend.)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Teens also use a wide range of communication tools to get in touch with their closest friend.

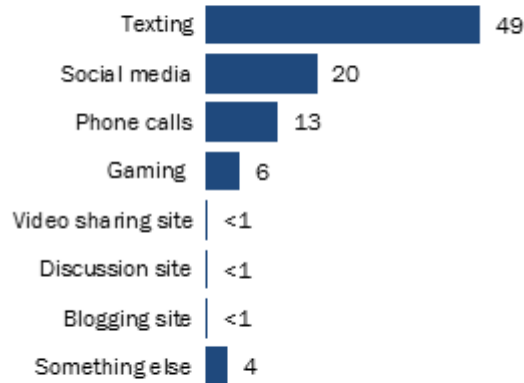
- 49% of teens say text messaging (including on messaging apps) is their first choice of platform for communicating with their closest friend.
- 20% say social media is their first-choice communication tool when talking with their closest friend.
- 13% say phone calls are the method they would choose first to talk with their closest friend.
- 6% say video games are their first-choice platform for talking with their closest friend.

Teens who live in lower-income households are more likely than higher-income teens to say they use social media to get in touch with their closest friend. Lower-income teens, from households earning less than \$30,000 annually, are nearly evenly split in how they get in touch with these friends, with 33% saying social media is the most common way they do so and 35% saying texting is their preferred communication method. Higher-income teens from families earning \$30,000 or more per year are most likely to report

texting as their preferred mode when communicating with their closest friend. Modestly lower levels of smartphone and basic phone use among lower-income teens may be driving some in this group to connect with their friends using platforms or methods accessible on desktop computers.

Texting Is Most Common Way Teens Get in Touch With Closest Friend

% of teens who say ... is the most common way they get in touch with their closest friend online or on a phone



Source: Pew Research Center Teens Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015. (n=1,009 teens ages 13 to 17 with a close friend).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Smartphone users have different practices for communicating with close friends

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of teens have access to a smartphone, and smartphone-using teens have different practices for communicating with close friends. Teens with smartphones rely more heavily on texting, while teens without smartphones are more likely to say social media and phone calls are preferred modes for reaching their closest friend.

- 58% of teens with smartphone access prefer texting when communicating with their closest friend, while just 25% of teens without smartphone access say the same.
- 29% of teens without smartphone access say social media is the most common way they get in touch with a close friend; 17% of smartphone users say the same.
- 21% of teens without smartphones say they make phone calls to their closest friend as a primary mode of communication, compared with 10% of smartphone users.

Girls are more likely to use text messaging - while boys are more likely to use video games - as conduits for conversations with friends

Compared with boys, girls tend to communicate more often with friends via texting and instant messaging:

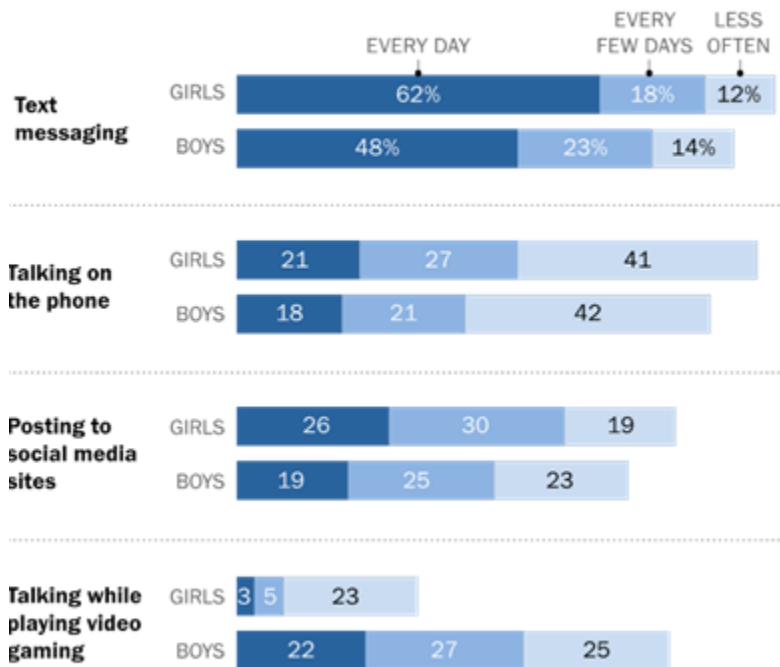
- 62% of girls spend time with friends every day via text messaging, compared with 48% of boys.
- 32% of girls spend time with friends every day using instant messaging, compared with 23% of boys.

On the other hand, boys are much more likely than girls to interact and spend time with friends while playing video games:

- 74% of teen boys talk with friends while playing video games together, while 31% of girls report the same.
- 22% of boys talk daily with friends while playing video games, compared with just 3% of girls.

Girls More Likely to Spend Time With Friends Daily via Messaging, Social Media; Boys Do the Same Through Video Games

% of all teens who spend time every day with friends doing the following...



Source: Pew Research Center Teen Relationships Survey, Sept. 25-Oct. 9, 2014, and Feb. 10-March 16, 2015. (n=1060 teens ages 13 to 17.)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Phone calls are less common early in a friendship, but are an important way that teens talk with their closest friends

Some 85% of teens say they spend time with friends by calling them on the phone, and 19% do so every day. The perceived intimacy of the phone call as a communication choice means teens are less likely to use it immediately upon meeting a new friend, but they often prefer it when talking to close friends.

- About half of teens (52%) indicate that a phone number for calling is one of the first three things they would share with a new friend, but just 9% indicate that this is the first thing they would share.
- And when teens want to talk to their closest friend, phone calls are the second most popular method overall, with 69% of teens citing phone calls as one of their three choices.

84% of black teens say phone calls are one of the three most common methods they use to get in touch with close friends, compared with 69% of whites and 63% of Hispanic teens.