

Stressed teens benefit from coping online, but less is more

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Teenagers who spend a few hours online after a stressful experience fare better than those who frequently use this strategy or not at all a Griffith University-led study published in the journal *Clinical Psychological*

Science has found.

Researchers from the "How do you feel" project conducted "in vivo" in-the-moment research with adolescents living in low socio-economic areas, and lent them new iPhones to report on their technology use, stressors, and emotions five times daily for a week.

"Because adolescents in disadvantaged settings have fewer local supports, the study sought to find out whether online engagement helped reduce their stress," said lead researcher Dr. Kathryn Modecki, from Griffith's Menzies Health Institute Queensland and School of Applied Psychology.

"In the face of daily stressors, when adolescents engaged in [emotional support](#) seeking, self-distraction or [information](#) seeking online in a moderate capacity, they experienced better short-term stress relief," she said.

"Teens showed smaller dips in happiness and smaller surges in emotions like sadness, worry and jealousy in the hours after a stressor when they used online coping techniques for some of their stress relief.

"There has been a tendency to assume that technology is negative and harmful, but such a broad assumption isn't borne out by what we know about the developmental stage of adolescence."

Dr. Modecki wanted to test the "Goldilocks Hypothesis," where moderate health-seeking behavior is beneficial but extreme use or non-use less so.

When adolescents engaged in moderate amounts of emotional support seeking online in the hours after a stressor, they were protected against dips in happiness and against surges in loneliness.

Likewise, moderate use of online self-distraction versus high or no distraction resulted in reduced worry, jealousy and anger, while moderate amounts of online information seeking protected against dips in sadness.

"This study works to reframe technology's effects towards potential benefits for adolescents, in this case enhancing their ability to cope effectively with day-to-day stressors," Dr. Modecki said.

"The online space is an unequaled resource for adolescents to find support and information about what is troubling them as well as short-term distraction."

She said it was even more pertinent for teens living in low-income settings where technology can help even the playing field for accessing helpful systems of information and additional supports.

"Teenagers benefit from the online space when managing [stressors](#) encountered in everyday life; they can discover accurate information, connect with support systems and even take a break from daily hassles."

The study has been published in the journal *Clinical Psychological Science*.

More information: Kathryn L. Modecki et al, Adolescents' Online Coping: When Less Is More but None Is Worse, *Clinical Psychological Science* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/21677026211028983](https://doi.org/10.1177/21677026211028983)

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