

'Toxic fandom:' When your child's celebrity worship goes too far

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It's not new for young people to develop an interest in their favorite pop

singer or actor, but it can be problematic if that adoration turns toxic.

It's easier than ever to get lost in a [celebrity's](#) carefully curated image via [social media posts](#), according to Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, which offers some tips for when fandom goes too far.

"Artists may do things that encourage people to get to know them better, so when they start giving people a peek into their lives and creating a persona that their fans can emotionally invest in, they get more people interacting with their work and also gain prestige and make more money," explained [Dr. Laurel Williams](#), an associate professor in the Menninger Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Baylor.

Any fan can become unhealthily invested in celebrities or individuals, Williams said.

Previously, fans had to spend money and time repeatedly to see a celebrity and then cultivate a connection that could turn obsessive—but in today's internet age, celebrity channels are available online anytime.

Superficial connections are now more easily and frequently made, Williams cautioned, and adolescents are more susceptible to having addictive emotions over this.

"When someone starts 'speaking their truth' about a celebrity or topic in a way that dehumanizes others, either online or in person, that's when you know there's a problem," Williams said in a Baylor news release. "People sometimes invest hundreds or thousands of hours into a celebrity only to be disappointed by the celebrity. In turn, their feelings can come out as anger towards others and sometimes even as [self-harm](#)."

Online content is edited, designed and not real, Williams stressed.

Real, in-person relationships can teach the difference between superficial and genuine connection, she said. They can also teach that words carry weight and what you say has consequences.

Williams' advice to [fans](#): Don't spend too much time on channels that are designed to constantly keep your attention. Use tools provided in phones or apps that limit the time you spend there.

Parents of adolescents should be curious about what their children are interested in and engage with the content if prompted, Williams said.

Parents should also be able to have an open, non-judgmental conversation with their child about it if they see something they don't like.

"If you find yourself alone, obsessed or even feel stuck on a celebrity, don't feel embarrassed to reach out for help," Williams said. "Do things that you feel will practically keep you out of that obsessive cycle and use the people around you to help you stay accountable in not spending too much [time](#) in the fandom."

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has some tips on creating a [family media plan](#).

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