

Digital Media Use in Families

Theories and Strategies for Intervention



Kristin A. Dalope, MD, MEd^{a,*}, Leonard J. Woods, LCSW^b

KEYWORDS

- Digital media • Families • Social-ecological • Family systems • Developmental • Parenting

KEY POINTS

- Digital media is changing the lives of individuals and families.
- A social-ecological framework shows how media has both a direct and indirect impact on individuals, relationships, communities, and society.
- Family systems theory demonstrates how digital media is incorporated into family dynamics.
- A developmental framework explores the role of digital media in shaping parenting.
- Practical strategies and resources (eg, the Family Media Use Plan from the American Academy of Pediatrics) are available and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

When a child, adolescent, or family presents to a professional with concerns about digital media use, there are three frameworks that can be useful in determining where and how to intervene. The social-ecological model illustrates the direct and indirect impact of media on individuals, relationships, communities, and society. Family systems theory demonstrates the integration of digital media-related issues into family dynamics. A developmental framework explores the role of digital media in shaping parenting. These theories can inform practice by providing clinicians a variety of strategies, including recommendations and resources (eg, Family Media Use Plan) from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

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^a Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, Merck Clinic, Franklin Building, 1st Floor, 1011 Bingham Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15203, USA; ^b Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Center for Children and Families, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, Merck Clinic, Franklin Building, 1st Floor, 1011 Bingham Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15203, USA

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: dalopek@upmc.edu

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Terms of Reference

Digital media is a generic term for any content in electronic form. Common examples of digital media include:

- Text
- Audio
- Photographs
- Videos (eg, broadcast television, streaming video services)
- Software (eg, mobile apps and video games)
- Messaging and chat (eg, email, instant messaging, video chat)
- Web sites and online services (eg, social media, discussion forums, newspapers, blogs).

Digital media is accessed, consumed, created, modified, shared, used, or interacted with on a constantly evolving set of technology platforms. These technologies may be:

- Hand-held, mobile devices (eg, smartphones, mobile gaming consoles, tablets, e-readers)
- General purpose laptops or computers
- Gaming consoles
- Televisions.

Most of these technology platforms have Internet connectivity. Due to the pervasive and growing use of digital media by children, adolescents, and parents on these technology platforms, it is helpful to understand how digital media can have such a significant impact on families. With that in mind, three models and theories are presented here.

FAMILY MODELS AND THEORIES

Social-Ecological Model

The Center for Disease Control uses a 4-stage, social-ecological model to describe how an individual exists within a variety of systems.¹ This model ([Fig. 1](#)) describes an individual (eg, child or adolescent) who has a variety of relationships (eg, family and peers), which are present within a community (physically and virtually), which all exist within a society (with overarching laws and norms). The concentric nature of the model illustrates how factors at any level can have a direct or indirect impact on the other levels.

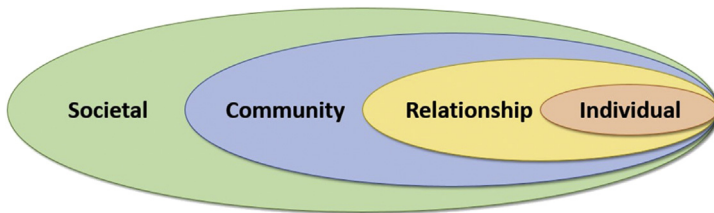


Fig. 1. Social-ecological model. (*Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Violence prevention. The social-ecological model: a framework for prevention. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html>. Accessed May 30, 2017; with permission.*)

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