LYNX TRACKS

The Newsletter of the Lincolnville Central School

http://www.fivetowns.net/lcs

Middle School Music Program on Display

Our middle school chorus put on a wonderful show last week in Walsh Common under the direction of Ms. Emily Mathieu. The band and stage band also took the time to show us their stuff. It was a very enjoyable evening of music.

Apps to Watch Out for in 2019

Stay on top of the popular titles teens are already using.

By Christine Elgersma 1/11/2019, Reprinted from Common Sense Media: www.commonsensemedia.org

It's a new year, and that means new apps on your tweens' and teens' phones. While the old standbys like Snapchat and Instagram are still going strong, there's no shortage of social media, video-sharing, and homework-help apps that are popular but not necessarily household names. Of course, it's nearly impossible to keep up with every hot new app, which makes knowing the risky features -- like interaction with strangers, anonymity, privacy concerns, and iffy content -- a solid first step. But it's still important to know the specifics of what's on your kid's device and whether or not you'll allow it to stay there.

Check out the titles below so you have a sense of what your kid -- or your kid's friends -- may be using and what you need to know about each app. And since all of these are free, be aware that the developers make money on them through in-app purchases, ads, selling user data, or all of the above!

BIGO LIVE - Live Stream

Kind of like Twitch and YouTube, BIGO LIVE lets teens stream live video of themselves that other users can see and comment on in real time. You can also receive and send "Beans" -- BIGO's term for virtual gifts -- that cost real money. You can level up and improve your ranking by logging in every day and sending gifts. The platform is designed for people who supposedly want to get famous, but it seems to be filled mainly with people competing for gifts.

What parents need to know

BIGO has a lot of mature content, including sexy talk and clothing, and users' comments are often predatory and explicit. Also, its focus on status and spending money, as opposed to creativity and talent, makes it feel shallow.

8th Grade High School Course Registration

It is time for Rising 9th graders to be thinking about classes for their freshman year at Camden Hills Regional High School. To that end, there will be an 8th grade Course Registration Informational Meeting with the High School Guidance Director, Jeremy Marks, on **Tuesday, January 29th from 5:30-7:00** in the Walsh Common here at LCS. Before the meeting, at 5:30, a meal will be provided for all students and family members who attend the session. The informational session will begin promptly at 6:00. In preparation for the meeting, students must leave their laptops here at school the afternoon of January 29th. All eligible students will be able to bring their laptops home after the presentation.

For families with younger siblings, free childcare will be available in the Art Room during the meeting. Please let Ms. Richards know if you will be using the childcare option as soon as If you have any questions call the Guidance Office at extension 110.

Note: In the event of inclement weather, the snow date is set for Wednesday, January 30th at the same time and location.**

PTO Notes:

Save the Date for the PTO Pizza fundraising night, which will be held on Tuesday, February 5th at Flatbread Pizza, Route One in Rockport.

Mittens and gloves are needed! LCS is in need of extra mittens and gloves for kids to borrow while at school. If you have extras, please consider donating them to the school. Donations may be given to Marie.

Excessively Torn Clothing

Please note that our Student/Parent Handbook clearly states our policy with regard to acceptable dress standards. We are seeing high numbers of kids showing up at school with pants that are excessively torn. This is a fashion trend that constitutes a violation of LCS policy. We ask that you help us maintain our dress standards by reminding your children to wear the ripped up pants on the weekend. Thank you!

BitLife

   In this simulation game, you're assigned an identity to play through the entire game, from infancy to death. As you play -- and your character gets older -- you can make text-based choices about how to make money, spend time, and develop relationships with pretend profiles (which aren't connected to real people). Those choices determine your levels of happiness, health, smarts, and appearance. When you die, you can start all over.

What parents need to know

   While kids can't engage in actual risky behavior, BitLife exposes them to mature ideas. As your character gets older, you can choose to "hook up" with the pretend profiles, drink, do drugs, gamble, and commit crimes. (On the other hand, you can make healthy choices such as going to the gym and meditating.) It's also easy for players to become overly fixated on the idealized world of sim games. Because you can start over when your character dies, there's the promise of endless free play, which could be a concern if your teen is really into the game.

Discord

   Discord is an app and site that allows gamers to connect via text, voice, and video. It's similar to a discussion board like Reddit, but the conversations are hosted on various servers -- which anyone can create -- and each server can have multiple channels. The main purpose of the platform is to be able to chat with your team while playing an online game, but people also use it as straight-up social media, even if they're not playing.

What parents need to know

   Easily viewable adult content and the ability to chat privately with strangers make Discordrisky for young teens. Mature areas are supposed to be labeled "NSFW" (not safe for work) and age-gated for under-18-year-olds. But you just need to click through to access. And while there's a privacy setting to control who can send your teen private messages, they can easily go in and change those settings.

HOLLA: Live Random Video Chat

   This app is all about connecting with strangers. Once you sign up using a phone number or your Facebook account, you can get matched instantly with a stranger -- and both you and they appear on camera. Or you can swipe Tinder-style until you like someone and they like you (by tapping a heart). You can also enable location tracking to be paired with someone nearby.

What parents need to know

   Video-chatting with strangers can be risky for teens. When it's paired with location, it's a no-go. Also, while HOLLA supposedly bans iffy content -- like nudity and violence -- user reviews indicate that masturbation, fake identities, and negative comments are common. The app's age-matching is a red flag, too. It was easy for our tester to pose as a 13-year-old and get paired with 16- and 17-year-olds.

IMVU: 3D Avatar Creator & Chat

   Using the website or the app, users interact through elaborate 3D avatars. You can dress them up, place them in public or private rooms, and follow other users and chat with them. You can also buy a wide variety of objects using virtual coins -- earned primarily through taking surveys or watching ads or through buying outright with real money. There's no game or goal other than acquiring outfits, rooms, furniture, and other items or chatting with other users.

What parents need to know

   Virtual sex and user privacy are the main issues for teens in IMVU. The avatars sport highly stereotypical body types with big muscles or breasts, and many of the outfits are skimpy. It also appears that users generate a following on other platforms by sharing their IMVU usernames, which invites more contact with people they don't know. Finally, the search term "IMVU sex" results in lots of advice about how to have (virtual avatar) sex and where to find it in IMVU.

Like - Magic Music Video Editor

   Similar to the video lip-synching service Tik Tok, Like lets you create short videos that often involve lip-synching. You can also follow other users, climb a leaderboard (based on how many likes you've gotten), send direct messages, and send virtual gems -- that cost real money -- to other users.

What parents need to know

   Also like Tik Tok, Like features mature music and dancing and allows strangers to interact. The leaderboard motif encourages kids to post frequently and gather likes -- basically to keep kids on the app longer and increase their circle of friends (which only benefits the company). So while it can be creative and fun, it's best used with strict privacy settings by teens who are savvy about keeping themselves safe online.

Lipsi

   Lipsi is yet another anonymous "feedback" app that lets users tell others what they think of them without revealing their own identities. The twist here is that users can get a Lipsi link to post in their Instagram profiles so the comments appear in their Instagram feeds. It's possible to identify yourself if you wish or to stay in "ghost mode" to hide out for a while.

What parents need to know

Like the short-lived Sarahah, lots of posts are positive, but anonymous feedback services are generally a recipe for bullying and trolling. If your kid uses Lipsi with a public Instagram account, all of their Instagram followers can read the comments written by other people. While Lipsi is supposed to be for users over 17, there's no real barrier to downloading.

Socratic Math & Homework Help

   This app lets you take a picture of a homework problem or question and get an answer and explanation in return, similar to Photomath. Because it's more focused and filtered than an open internet search, the results are more targeted and helpful (in other words, it gives you the answers).

What parents need to know

The biggest concern is cheating: If your kid decides to use this app as an easy way out of homework, they'll lose a lot of learning. Secondly, since the answers come from the internet, they aren't always right. Used with good judgment (and monitoring by a parent), a teen could legitimately use Socratic Math to dig into tough concepts, but it's pretty easy to use for cheating.

Tellonym

This is an anonymous messaging app that invites users to follow contacts to get and give anonymous feedback. You can also link your Tellonym account to other social media accounts.

What parents need to know

Though the developers claim comments are moderated and users have to be 17 to use it, neither of those efforts are preventing bullying and online drama. Comments about users being ugly and that they should kill themselves pepper app store reviews, and connecting the app account to a wider pool of social media users only intensifies the risk.

Zepeto

Zepeto is a combination avatar-maker and social media platform. The main draw is the ability to create your own likeness and have your avatar interact with your friends' avatars so you can create cute posts for social media. In a section of the app called "Zepeto town street," you can text with people you don't know.

What parents need to know

Zepeto's texting format is less risky than the video-chatting of HOLLA, but any interaction with strangers is iffy (especially for younger teens who might be interacting with grown-ups). User privacy is probably a bigger problem, though. Zepeto doesn't use location-tracking, but it does collect plenty of information on its users. And like some others on this list, there's a focus on image and appearance as well as lots of opportunities to spend money.

Just for Kids Yoga

DATES:
Mondays, January 28 - March 11
(No class February 18)

TIME:
3:15 - 4:15 p.m.

LOCATION:
Lincolnville Central School
523 Hope Road, Lincolnville

COST:
$30 for 6 sessions
(Family discounts and scholarships
available upon request)

REGISTER BY JANUARY 24:
journeytohealth.coursestorm.com
or call 921-3950

Traditionally, children are introduced to yoga through stories, songs and games. Our yoga instructors will continue this practice in a six-week class, where your children will move in and out of yoga poses while exploring stories that teach us about happiness, anger, love and much more. This class is appropriate for children ages 7 - 11.

Journey to Health

Pen Bay Medical Center | Waldo County General Hospital

HOW TO FOSTER MENTAL FOCUS IN OUR KIDS—AND OURSELVES

Delaney Ruston, MD January 22, 2019

How do we achieve maximal mental focus in an overly wired and wireless world? This is the question that Georgetown University professor, author, and father, Cal Newport, addresses in his forthcoming book Digital Minimalism. He writes about ways to prune one's digital life, getting it down to those technologies that truly help us to think deeper.

I often talk about how new strategies for helping our kids focus in this tech revolution whether that's enforcing a no-cell-phone rule at school or ways to stay on task while doing homework. So, I am always excited to get ideas from others about helpful approaches to fostering deep thinking.

One of the reasons I wanted to discuss this topic is that it gives us a chance to share with our kids some of the strategies we use to have focused times. When I talk with youth they often complain about how distracted adults are on their devices—yes, true—AND we are often doing work on our devices. So, subtly reinforcing that point, and how we stay on task when we are doing that, is key. Newport argues that we should be much more selective about the technologies we adopt in our personal lives and "radically reduce the time you spend online, focusing on a small number of activities chosen because they support things you deeply value, and then happily miss out on everything else." He also says something that I agree with: "Technology is intrinsically neither good nor bad. The key is using it to support your goals and values, rather than letting it use you."

In an interview that ran in the New York Times last week, Newport discusses with writer Tim Herrera how to achieve "deep work." Here are some of the main points Newport makes:

Give up tech temporarily to get back useful tech

He suggests something radical: give up all your things tech like apps, social media, etc., for a month to help reflect on your values and then mindfully add back only the ones that will help you to achieve those values. The basic idea is that people need to be more intentional and selective about what apps and services they allow into their digital lives. I find it really interesting that when embarking on the research for "Digital Minimalism" Newport asked his newsletter subscribers whether any of them wanted to try this idea. He thought just a handful of people would do it… but, in fact, 1600 responded.

I'm not proposing you go to this far, but I do think that the more we talk to our kids about our values, their values, and everyone's goals, the more it becomes clear that too much screen time can get in the way of one's values and goals.

Consciously carving out deep work time slots

Newport tells Herrera, "You cannot just wait until you find yourself with lots of free time and in the mood to concentrate. You have to actively fight to incorporate this into your schedule. It helps, for example, to include deep work blocks on your calendar, like meetings or appointments, and then protect them as you would a meeting or appointment". (BTW, Daniel Pink wrote a book called When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing that looks at the times of days that are more productive for certain tasks.)

Embracing boredom facilitates deep thought

Newport says to Herrera, "The ability to concentrate is a skill that you have to train if you expect to do it well…If you always whip out your phone and bathe yourself in novel stimuli at the slightest hint of boredom, your brain will build a Pavlovian connection between boredom and stimuli, which means that when it comes time to think deeply about something (a boring task, at least in the sense that it lacks moment-to-moment novelty), your brain won't tolerate it." While I do not agree with how he equates thinking deeply with boredom, I do agree that if one continually interrupts brain flow, new connections and mental breakthroughs can be hampered. (That's my excuse at least when my creativity falls short).

Here are three examples of things I do to help create times of undistracted thinking:

1. I absolutely have no notifications on my phone other than for texts. For a long time, I didn't even have a sound notification for texts but instead told people who might genuinely need my attention immediately to call in such cases. I have since turned back on the sound alert on my texts, but I am contemplating going back to the old way.

2. I often go to nearby cafes to do deep thinking such as intensive research and writing. For a good chunk of time at the cafes, I turn my off my Wifi so that I will not reflexively keep checking email.

3. I almost always keep a notebook at the side of my computer, so when thoughts pop up about things I want or need to do, such as check something online, send a text or make a call, I write the task down so to remember to do it later. For example, it's Saturday and right now I have the urge to do many things, such as go online and find the show time tonight of the improv theater near my home and to find the best driving route to my shoot today. Instead, I just write quickly these thoughts down in my notebook and stay focused on writing this TTT!

As a society, it is essential that we openly discuss how we can foster focused thinking in our children and students. I find it heartening that so many tech educators and IT leaders at schools reach out to us about showing Screenagers. These are the people that are tasked with integrating technology into schools, and they want to ensure that we are having a dialogue about how to best do this. Another reason I wanted to talk about this is that young people are thinking about these issues. When I ask them their strategies for staying focused, more often than not, they share things they are trying. Just today I was filming several middle schoolers and I asked them this question and they told me a few of their tricks like "putting on a timer" and "changing phone settings to 'Do Not Disturb' while doing homework".

For this week's Tech Talk Tuesday let's explore "digital minimalism" with our kids:

1) What are some of your values and goals right now in your life? When do these benefit from focused attention?
2) What strategies have you tried to create sacred time, i.e. free of distractions?
3) If all of a sudden screens disappeared in the world, and then you were able to choose 3 screen dependent activities/tools/apps that you could suddenly have, what would you pick?
4) Do you agree or not with this sentence, "To be able to think deeply, one needs to be able to tolerate and even embrace moments of boredom."