Shining a Light:
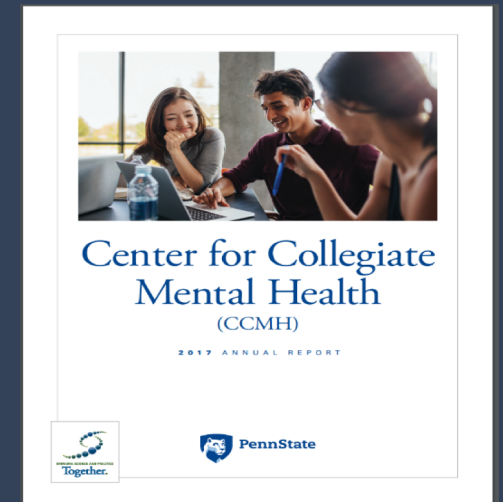# Student Mental Health

JBU Headmaster's Conference

June 2019

Dr. Steve Beers, VPSD

What is happening on our college campuses that illustrates the challenge?

Students seeking counseling appointments has grown by an average of 30%, five times the average rate of enrollment growth.

- Top presenting reasons - Anxiety and Depression
- Appointments were characterized by a "threat-to-self"
  - these students use about 20-30% more services.
- 66% of college drop-outs leave for mental health reasons
- 25% of students were diagnosed with or treated for MH
- 20% had thought about suicide
- 9% having attempted suicide
- 20% reporting self-injury

Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH)

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

Together.

PennState

Impact on College Community

- #1 issue facing our institutions is the epidemic of mental health challenges
- Especially at small residential campuses, this epidemic permeates everything from residence halls & athletic teams to public safety & faculty meetings *(this may be similar to small K-12).*

Getting a Handle on the College Situation:
Praxis Briefing

- Review of the literature

- Praxis Brief Development:
  - Meeting for 3-day task force summit with 7 CSDOs
  - Meeting with 32 Christian College Counseling Center Directors

Discussion Time:
Understanding the problem before we assign resources to fix it.

Discuss what you are seeing at your schools and summarize why you think there has been an increase in student counseling needs across the nation?

Understanding the challenge

Grounded in Research
Influenced by Relevant Practitioners

Normal Student Development

- Academic pressure
- Moving from home
- Living with others
- Financial stressors
- Chickering's Vectors
  1. *Developing competence*
  2. *Managing emotions*
  3. *Moving through autonomy towards interdependence*
  4. *Developing mature interpersonal relationships*
  5. *Establishing identity*
  6. *Developing purpose*
  7. *Developing integrity*

Increased Access, Decreased Stigma and Institutional Responsiveness

- Reduced stigma around counseling may be part of the increase in use
- Better referrals
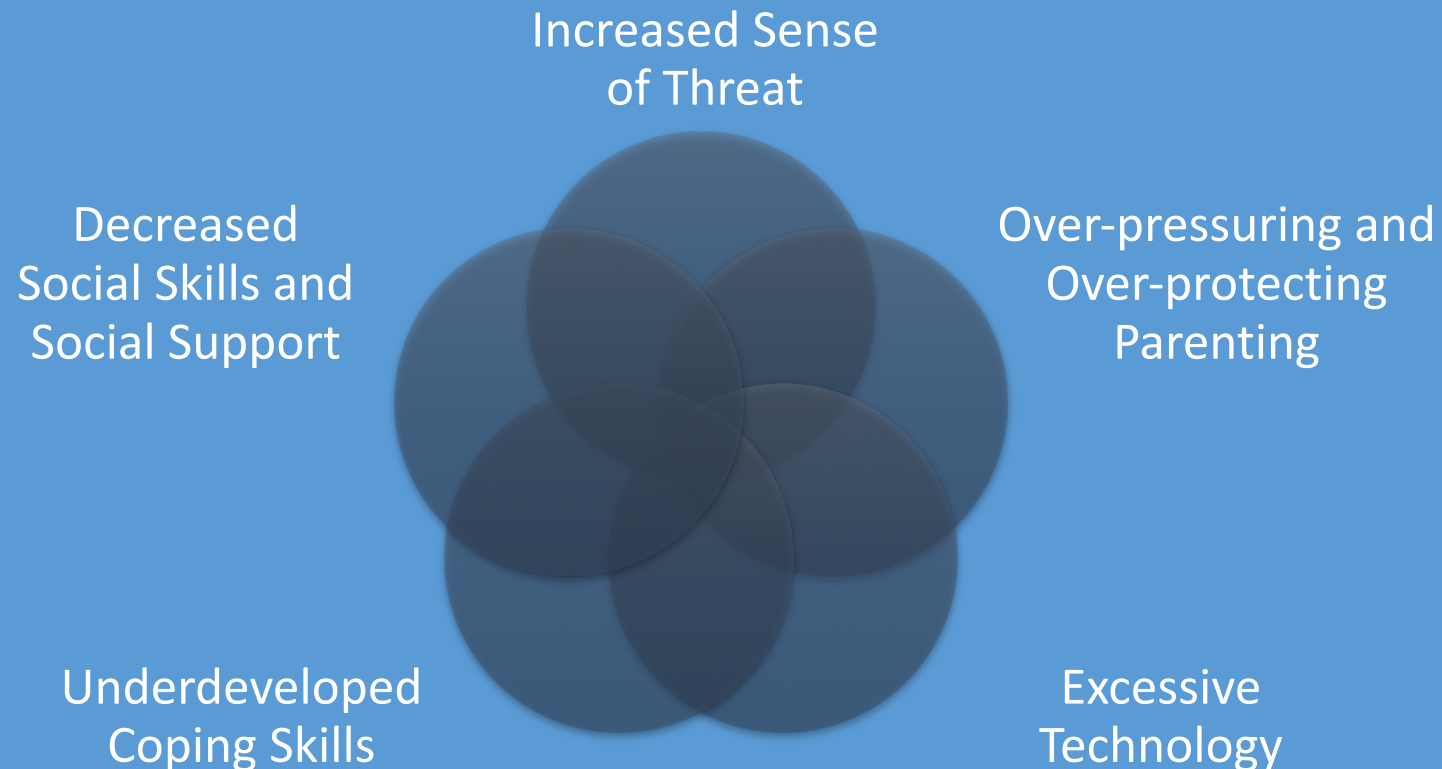- Better medication giving access to the school experiences

Increased Access, Decreased Stigma and Institutional Responsiveness
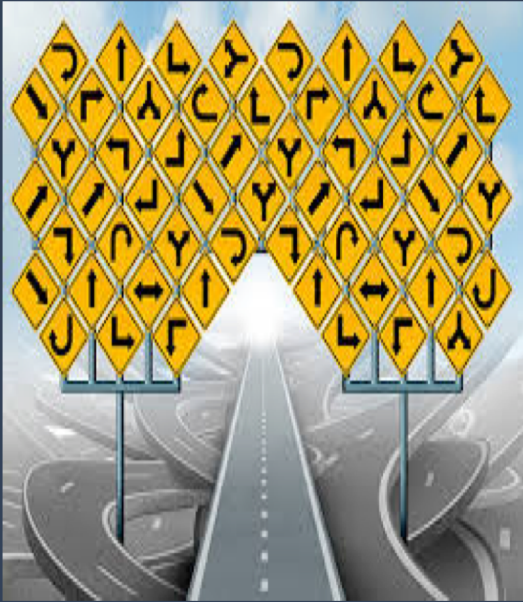
School's increased responsiveness
- Increased school-wide referral training
- Better prevention
- Intentional institutional risk reduction
- Retention and graduation sensitivity

Increased Mental Health Challenges and Decreased Resilience

Increased Sense of Threat

Over-pressuring and Over-protecting Parenting

Decreased Social Skills and Social Support

Underdeveloped Coping Skills

Excessive Technology

1. Increased Sense of Threat

- The world *feels* much more dangerous
- Landscape saturated by stressors
  - *Political and social unrest (Culture of argument)*
  - *School shootings*
  - *Discrimination*
  - *Gen Z navigating 2008 recession as a defining moment*
- ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
  - *2/3rds of adults have experienced 1 or more ACE.*
  - *1 out of 9 have experienced more than 4.*

2. Excessive Technology

- Current generation fully immersed with the smart phone
- Hyper connectivity
  - *FOMO*
  - *Increased bullying available 24/7 with wider audience*
  - *Lack of sleep due to screen use*
  - *Sedentary lifestyle due to screen use*
  - *Access to pornography and negative messaging*
- Every event has the ability to be broadcast
- Unhealthy comparison

FEAR OF MISSING OUT

3. Lack of Social Skills and Social Support

- Social skills are well documented to increase individual resilience.
- Students live under the veil of on-line social connection
- The Narcissism Epidemic
  - *Living in the age of entitlement*
- Increased expectations, external and internal
  - *"You can be anything you want"*
  - *"You can change the world."*

4. Over-pressuring and Over-protecting Parenting

- Potential back lash from "self-esteem" movement

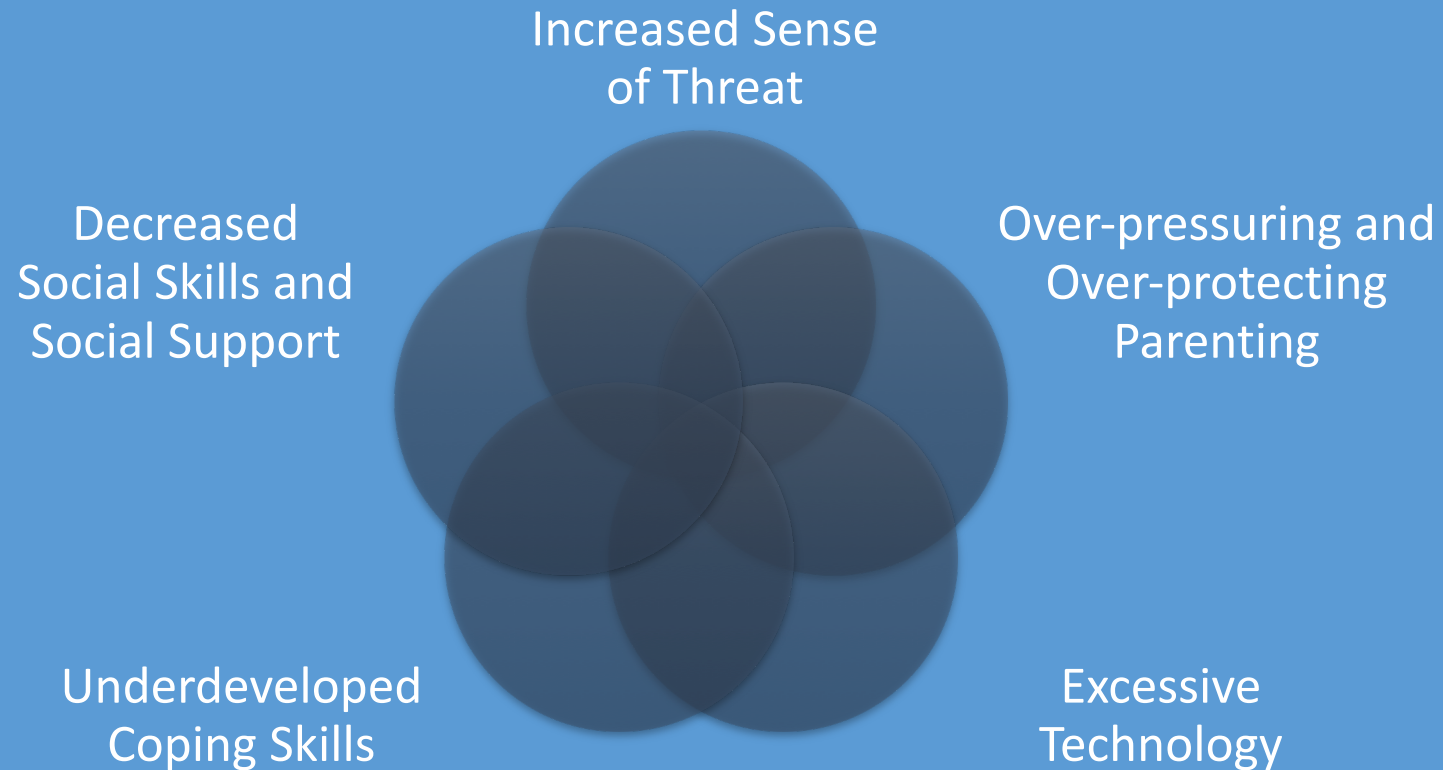- Backlash from "over protective" parents
  - *Helicopters & bulldozers*
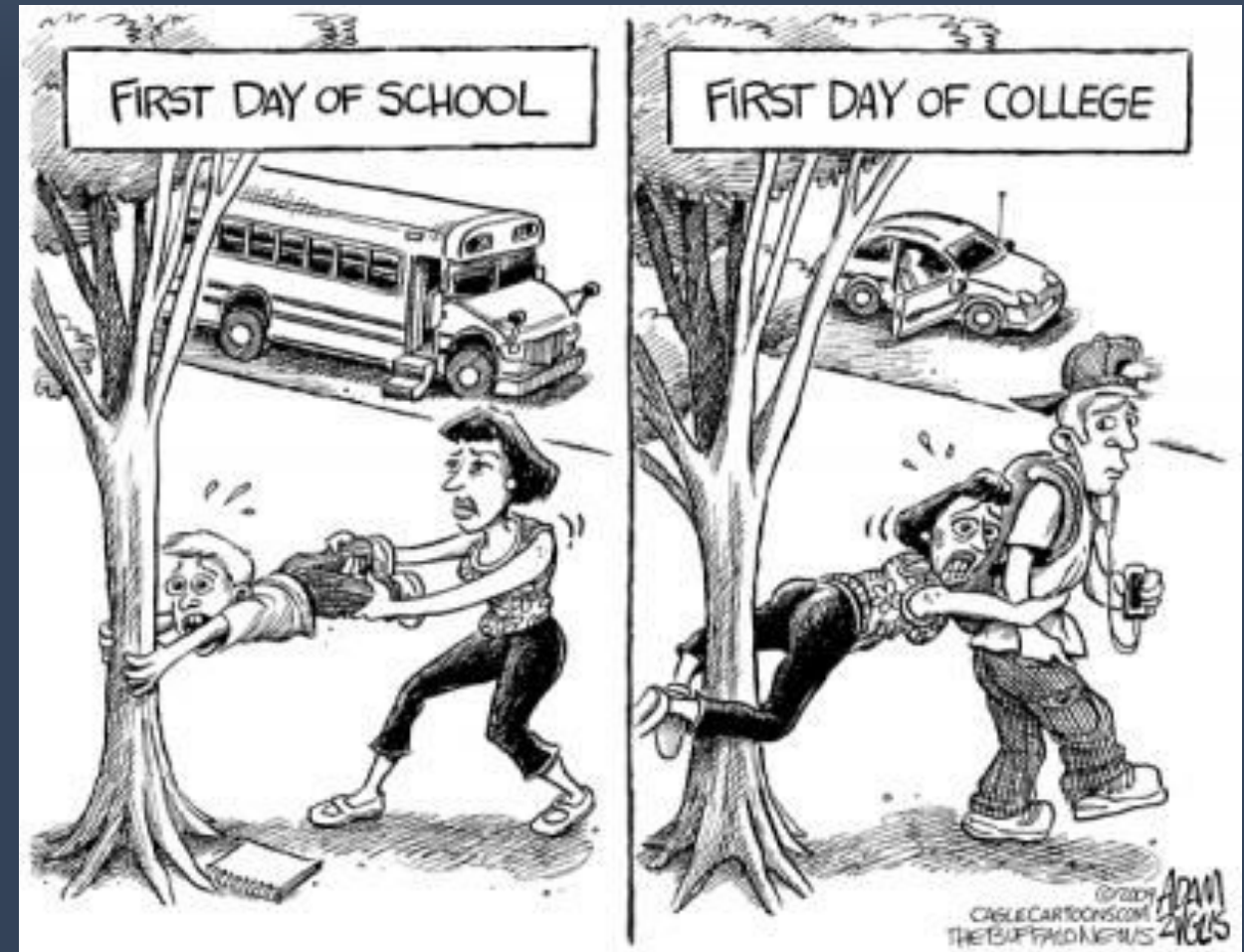
5. Underdeveloped Coping Skills

- Pathologizing fairly normal challenges

- Students' "fixed" mindset
  - *Not embracing a positive understanding of struggle and failure*

- Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
  - *Christian Smith's work on spiritual lives of American teenagers*

Increased Mental Health Challenges and Decreased Resilience

Increased Sense of Threat

Over-pressuring and Over-protecting Parenting

Decreased Social Skills and Social Support

Excessive Technology

Underdeveloped Coping Skills

Technology Addictions

i-Gen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* and What That Means for the Rest of Us
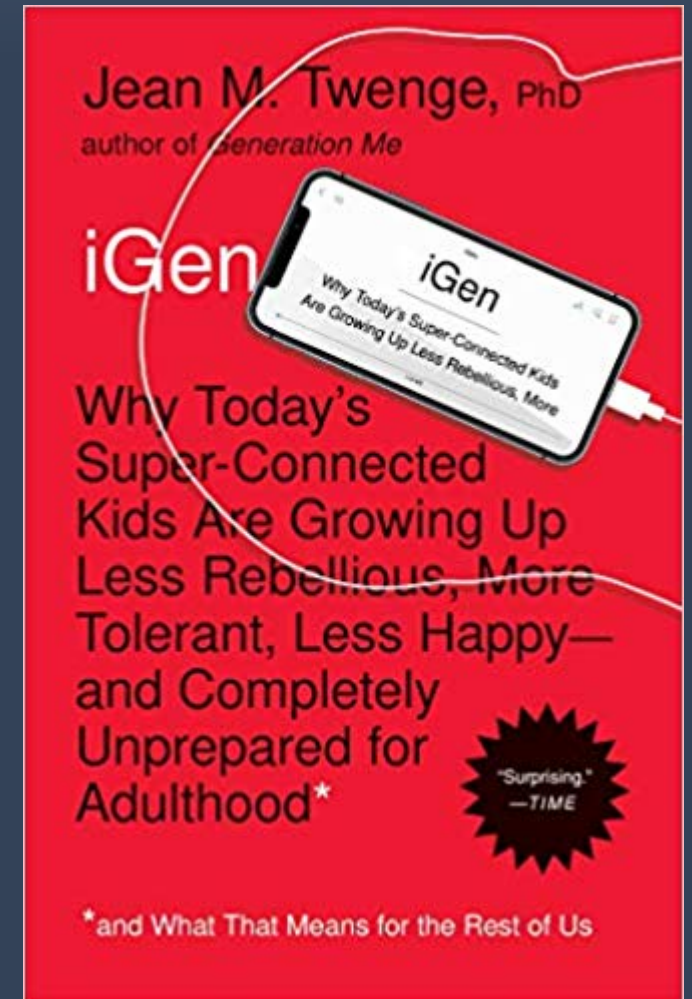
Jean M Twenge, 2017

Figure 3.10 Percentage with at least one suicide risk factor and percentage unhappy by hours a day spent on electronic devices or online (exposure-response cure), 8th- 12th Graders, 2013-15.
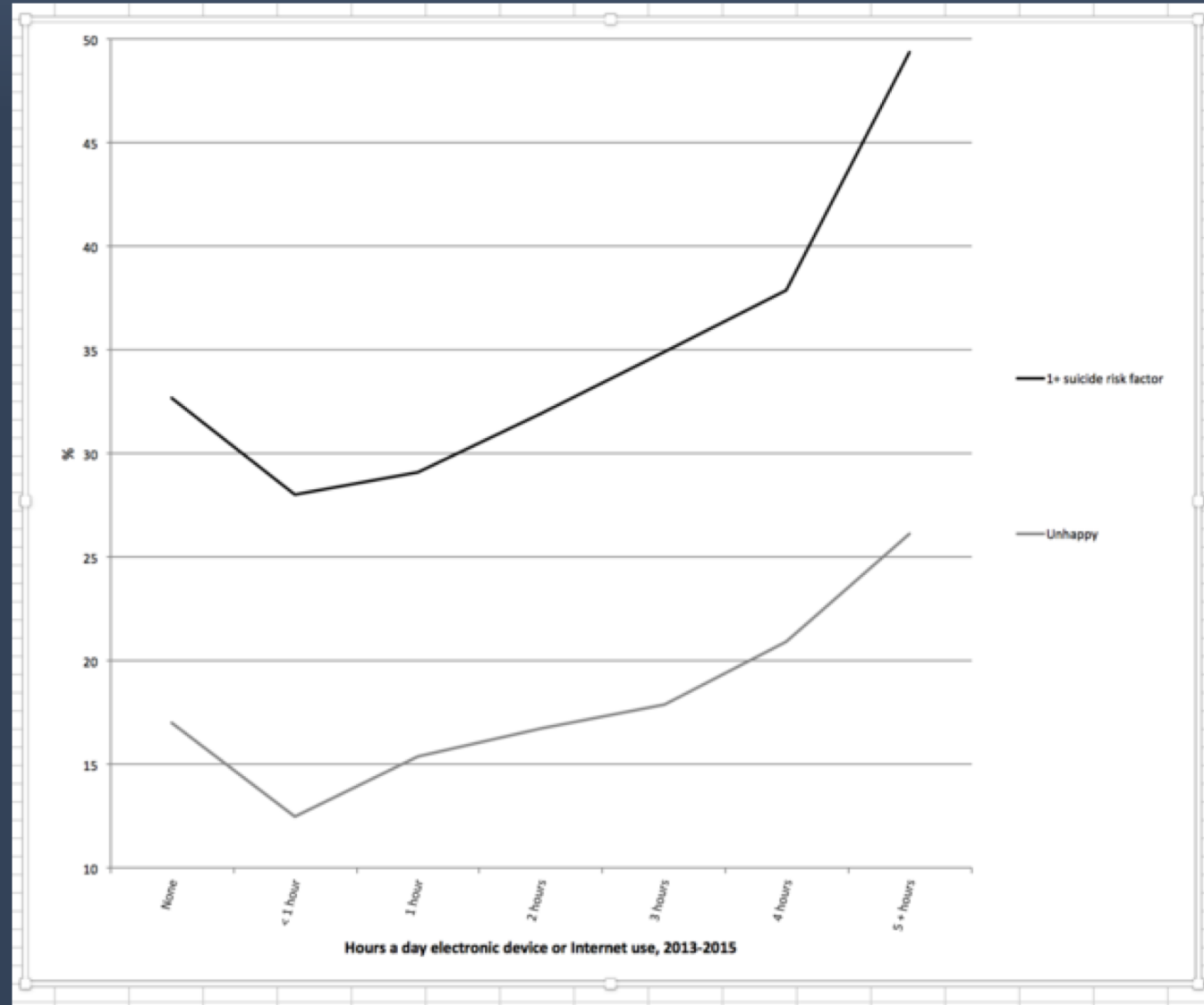
Figure 3.5 Relative Risk of being unhappy based upon time spent on screen and non screen activities. 8th graders 2013-15
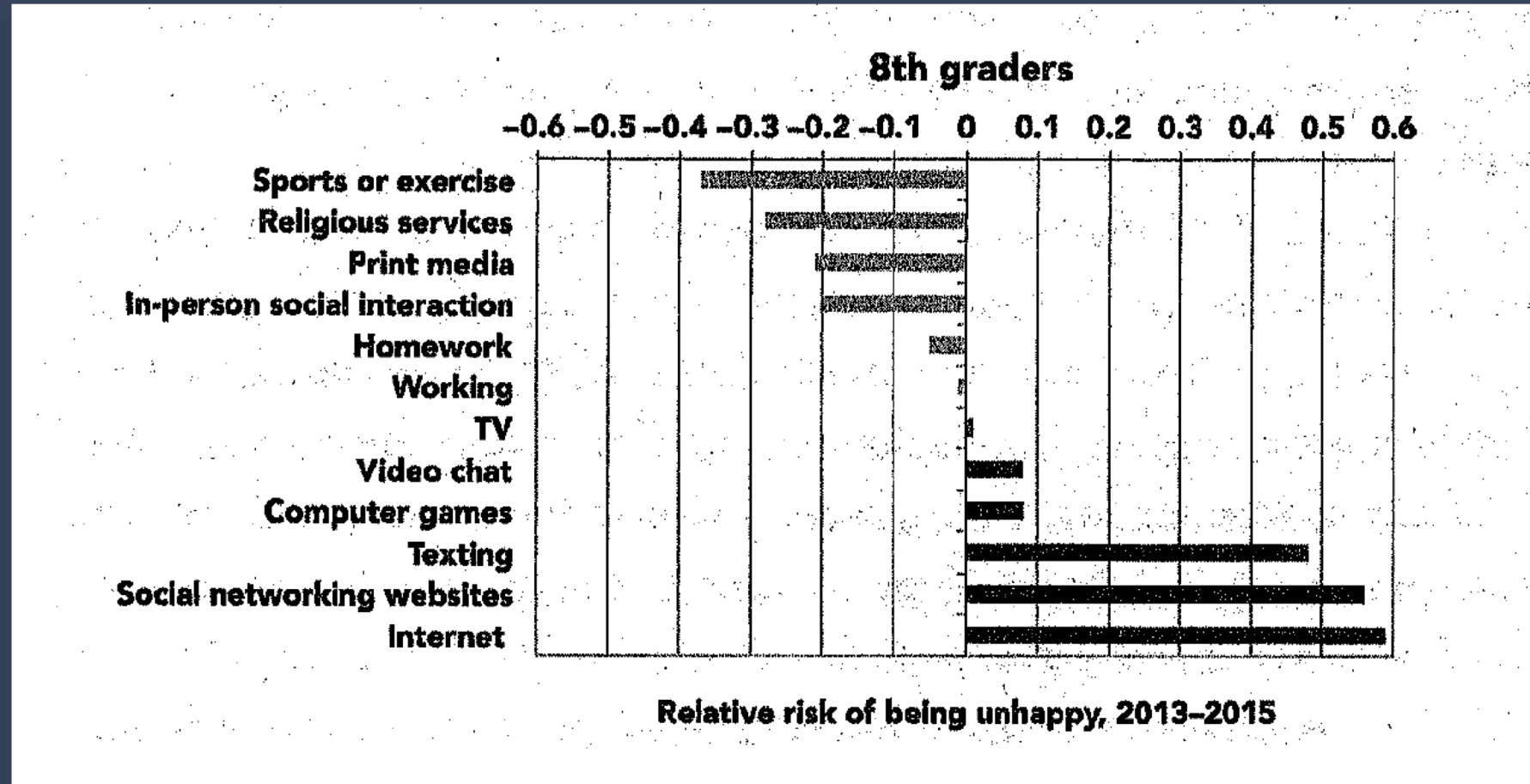

8th graders

Relative risk of being unhappy, 2013–2015

Fig 5.1 Percentage affiliating with any religion, 8th, 10th, and 12th graders and 18-24 year olds. 1972-2016

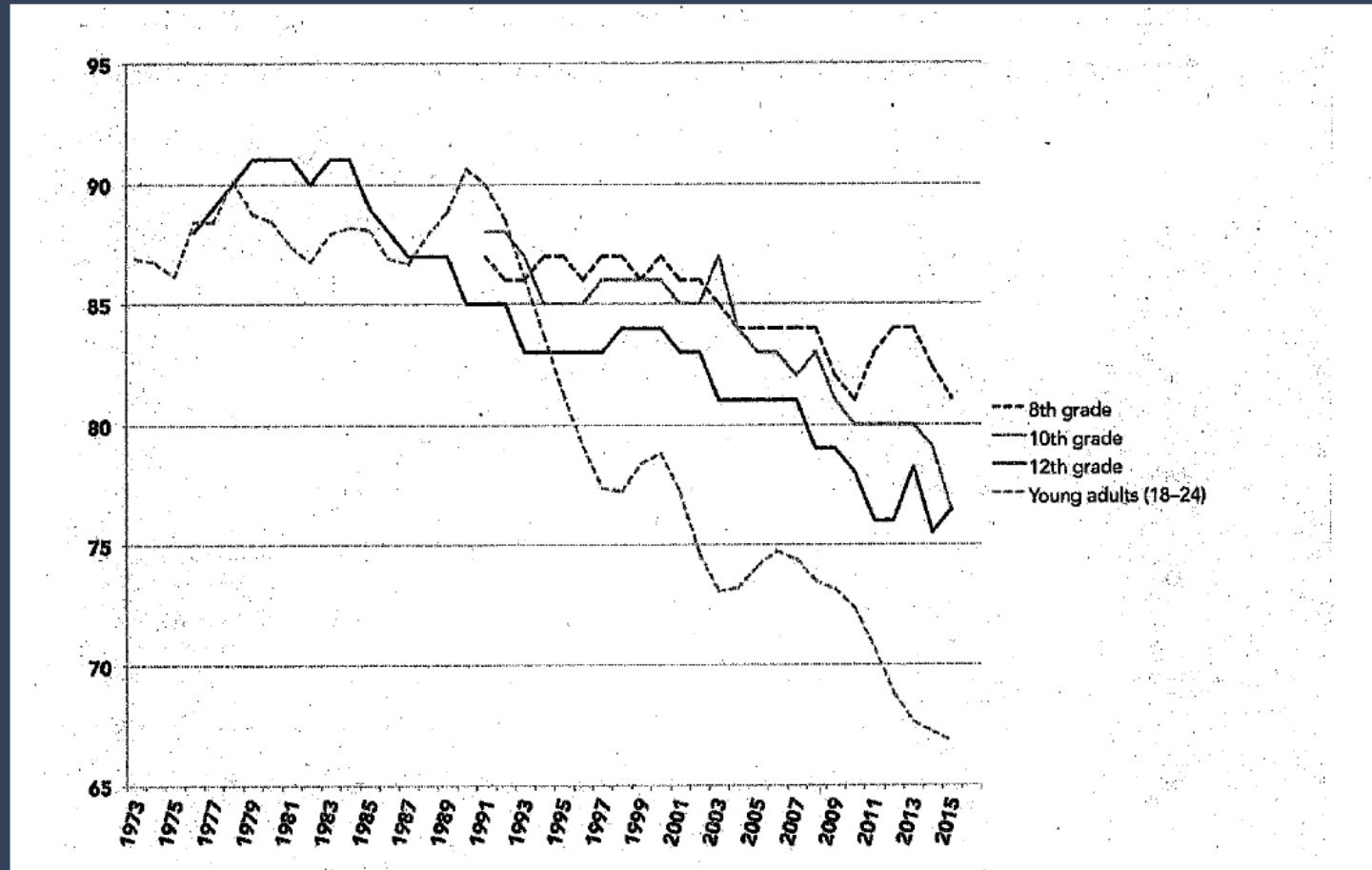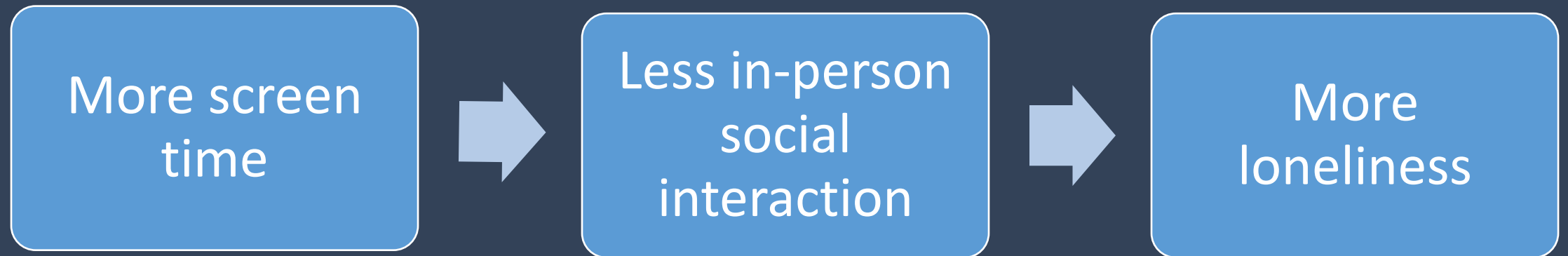# Fig 4.4 Possible model for origin of iGen loneliness

More screen time → Less in-person social interaction → More loneliness

Discussion: Now what should we do?

Some strategy ideas:

A. Student support resources
B. Initiate change in student culture
C. Assist "first responders" - Teachers and Staff

An analogy

Lessons learned from Life Guarding

- Provide appropriate expectations for staff
  - Rotation of staff and continued preparation including potential loss
- Systematically evaluate swimming area and those using the lake
  - Rope off sections of the lake
  - Teach student how to swim
  - Test students heading into the deep water
- Maximize the Guards impact
  - Preparation and training of Guards

Upper class students are no longer in the pool.....
they will be swimming in the open water!

Three Pronged Approach

Three Pronged Approach

1. ***Maximize current resources*** for student support

Three Pronged Approach

1. *Maximize current resources* for student support
2. *Shift the culture* through organizing campus wide programs

Three Pronged Approach

1. *Maximize current student support resources*
2. *Shift the culture* through organizing campus wide programs
3. *Provide staff with appropriate expectation* of what they can accomplish and what is expected of them

1. Student support resources

- Discuss what counseling and other student support looks like at your school

1. Student support resources: Equipping Others

- Important role of Counseling training/consultation

- Develop/select/lead training
  - Suicide prevention
  - Help others identify, respond, refer (when needed; not when not!)
  - Teachers, staff, Safety, Chaplains, Student Leaders

- Champion the resilience conversation with your students

2. *Shifting Student Culture - Policies*

Systemic Evaluation and Strategizing
- *Assess institutional policies that create anxiety*
- *Implement institutional polices that reduce anxiety*
- *Maximizing campus wide partnerships like academic programming*

Deep Dive into a JBU Policy

- ## Medical Leave
  - Since fall 2013, re-enrollment rates for "medical leave" outpaced re-enrollment rates for other withdrawals
  - 55% of medical withdrawals and 47% of non-medical withdrawals were in one of six majors
  - From Fall 2012 to Spring 2018 only 8 athletes withdrew
    - (2 medical and 6 non-medical)
- This begs the question – can we find a way to adjust the policy to initiate better return rates?

2. Shifting Student Culture – Programs

- Provide better theology/philosophy – transforming the mind
  - *Understanding our part/limitations in this world*
  - *Understanding the role of suffering*
  - *Being people of hope*
  - *Development of a Calling and Vocation*

- Build resilience into students
  - *Move from a "fixed" to a "growth" mindset*

## 2. Shifting Student Culture: Focus - Technology Addictions

Breaking technology addictions
- *Fasting*
- *Getting more sleep*

The Tech-Wise Family   Andy Crouch

- If you do only one thing – ruthlessly eliminate the things that ask little of you and develop little in you (illustration – TV) p 79

- So I suggest a simple minimal pattern of Sabbath: we choose to turn our devises off *not just one day every week but also one hour (or more) every day and one week (or more) every year. P 98*
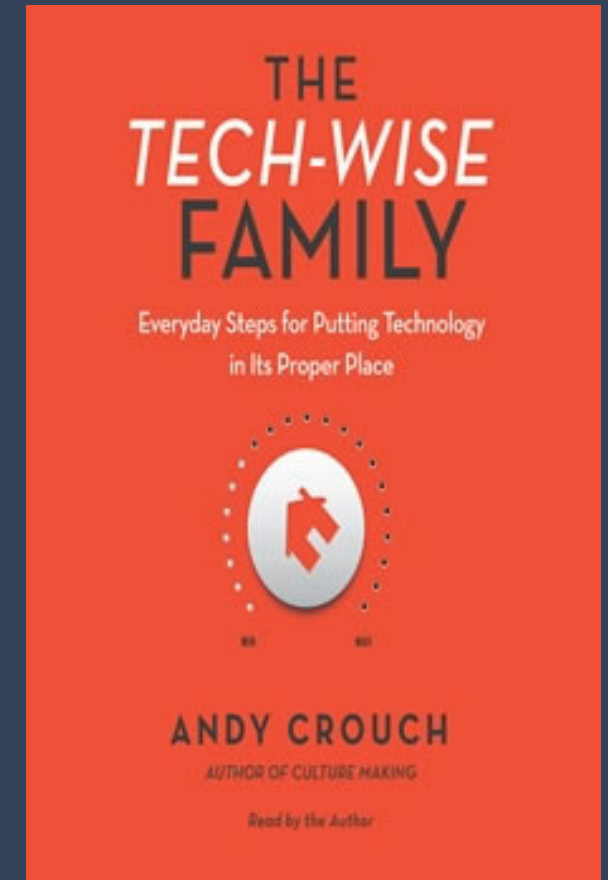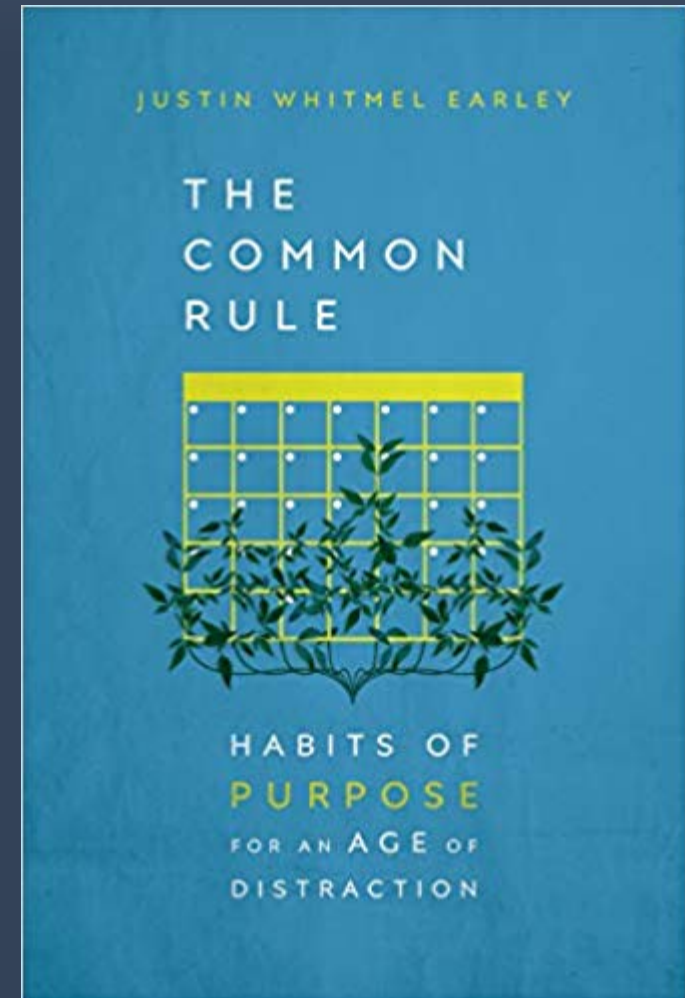
The Common Rule

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Tech related suggestions
  - One hour with phone off
  - Scripture before phone
  - Curate media to four hours
  - Sabbath

3. *Staff Expectations and Support*

Managing expectations
- *Clarifying staff responsibility at the institutional and individual level*
  - *Suicidal ideation assessment training*
  - *Homicidal ideation assessment*
  - *Defining student success and the limited role of staff influence*

3. *Staff Expectations and Support*

- Programs to help staff manage their own stress
  - *Teach strategies*
- Words of encouragement and hope from top

In Summary

The most prominent reasons for the increase of mental health concerns on our campuses are:

- Increased sense of threat

- Over-pressuring & over-protecting parents

- Excessive technology

- Under-developed coping skills

- Decreased social skills & social support

In Summary

Programming themes to help:

- Reframing situations
- Breaking addictions – Technology use
- Building resilience

Institutional strategies to help:

- Removing unnecessary policies that create student anxiety
- Creating a campus-wide wellness definition & strategy

Final Discussion – micro encouragement

Share with the person next to you about a time in the last 10 days when someone encouraged you.

Encouragement Takes Many Forms…

- *Words*
- *Compassion*
- *Acts of kindness*
- *Prayer*

…and goes a long way!

Romans 15:1-2 The Message (MSG)

- **15** **1-2** Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?"

Remember your Calling!

This may feel harder than student issues of the past…
…but with God's guidance
…and with peer support

WE CAN DO THIS! *…and so can our students!*

Questions?