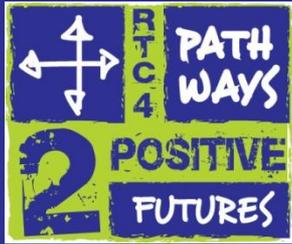


[www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu](http://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu)

# **Youth Online: A positive approach to smart use**

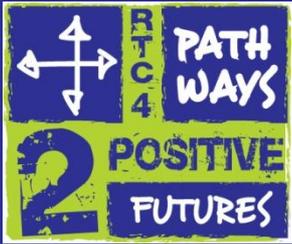
L. Kris Gowen  
Portland State  
University

Presented March 16, 2011 at the Disability Fair in Portland, Oregon.



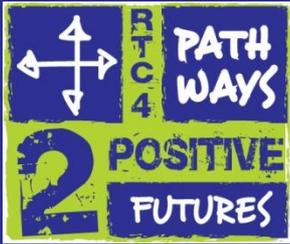
# *The Overwhelming Majority of Young Adults Use the Internet*

- Among young adults, ages 18-29
  - 93% go online
  - 72% use social networking
  - 72% looked for health information online
    - 33% looked up information about mental health



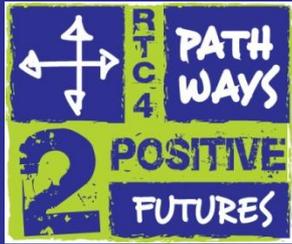
# Why Go Online?

- To look up information
- To connect with people
- To create



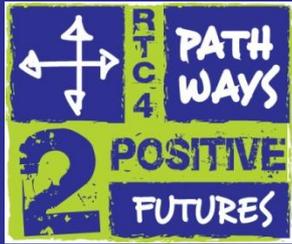
# Looking Up Information

- *People Use the Internet to Guide Their Health Decisions*
  - *“Every day, more people go online for medical advice than actually visit health care professionals”*
- 18% of adults have gone online to diagnose or treat a medical condition on their own, without consulting their doctor
- About half of online adult online health information seekers have read someone else's commentary or experience about health or medical issues
  - We think these numbers are higher for young adults specifically



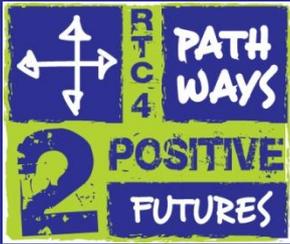
# Looking Up Information

- Topics Young Adults Look Up:
  - Medications
  - Diagnosis
  - Treatment Options
  - Insurance/Access to health care
  - Transition support/resources (e.g., coping skills, food stamps)



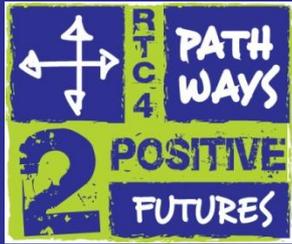
# Looking Up Information

- Why do they look up information online?
  - Finding out more: Looking up terms or something else not understood from another source/ Challenging/confirming information heard elsewhere
  - Community: Opinions/POVs/personal experience
  - Nowhere else to go: lack of insurance
  - To prepare for a health visit
  - Anonymity



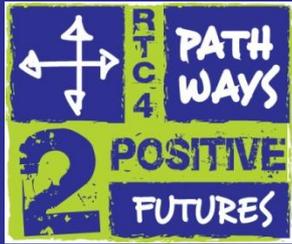
# Things to Consider

- The quality of online information  
Know Your **ABCs!**
  - **A**uthor/Authority
  - **B**usiness Model (URL designation)
  - **C**urrent information?
  - **S**ources
- Look for quality seals of approval/sites you can trust



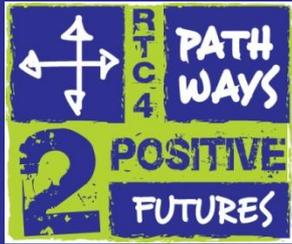
# Connecting with People

- Social networking: Facebook, MySpace, Twitter...
- Concern: relationships with “virtual acquaintances” can’t reach the same level of closeness as actual friendships, and lack the mutual feedback, support, and sense of security of more traditional relationships
- Research: social networking, including participation in chat rooms and blogging, may improve social connectedness, decrease isolation, and enhance subjective well-being through the practice of mutual feedback and self-disclosure



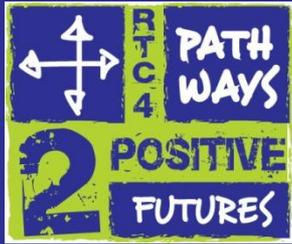
# Connecting with People

- 85% of teens have friends they talk to in person, but never online.
- 36% of teens have friends they talk to online, but never met in person.
  - 66% are “not at all” or “somewhat” close to these people
- 87% of teens have friends that they know in person and also talk to online.



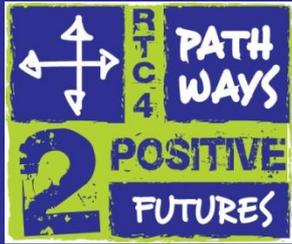
# Connecting with People

- NAMI asked: “Does a social networking site help transition-aged youth feel less isolated?”
  - 94% said “yes”
  - *I trust the people who I have met who have had similar experiences. I had never met anyone who was bipolar before I met them on the internet and they told me their experiences personally.*



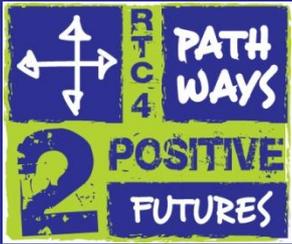
# Connecting with People

- Youth who develop close online relationships are:
  - More likely to be depressed
  - Have higher levels of conflict with parents
  - Less likely to communicate with parents
  
- Troubled youth are:
  - more likely to have an online romance
  - less likely to tell parent about meeting an online friend in person
  - more likely to say that the person they met did not look as expected



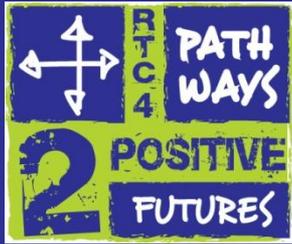
# Create

- 57% of teens create online content (*Pew, 2005*).
  - 22% have their own web page
- 52% of blogs are managed by 13-19 year olds (*Perseus Dev. Corp, 2003*).
  - Young adults with a mental health condition more likely to do this than those who do report having a mental health conditions (31% vs 2%)
- Teens create “positive” content online
  - Share stories
  - Support groups
  - Outreach



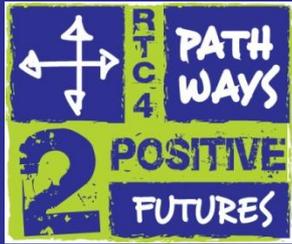
# Create

- Concerns:
  - Over-disclosure
    - Stigmatization
    - Sexting
  - Cyberbullying
    - Vulnerability
    - Perpetrator and/or recipient?



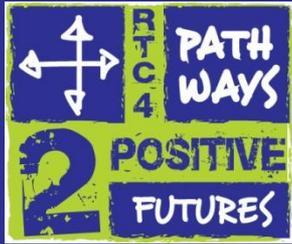
# Important Lessons

- **Searchability** – *Anyone* (friend or foe) can find it.
  - What happens when you Google your name?
    - Are you proud of what you see?
    - It is accurate?
- **Persistence** – Things posted online can be there forever unless someone actively takes it down from *all* locations (see “Replicability”).



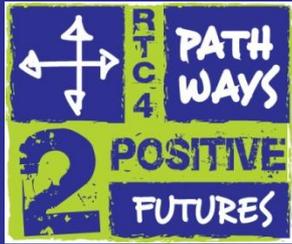
# Important Lessons

- **Replicability** – Any information found online can be shared/copied - in emails, IMs, profiles, via file-sharing networks, etc.
  - Legal issues
    - Copyright infringement
    - Child pornography
- **Invisible audience** - you don't know who you're sharing your information with, even if your page is private, because you don't know who has “borrowed” it (see “Replicability”).
  - Stigmatization



# Important Lessons

- Each person experiences media differently
  - Different people are going to react to your content differently.
  - Getting youth to step out of their shoes and into other roles.
- Media are constructions of reality, not reality
  - How do you represent yourself online?
    - Popularity



# Important Lessons

- Talk about the internet as a public/private space.
- Think of social networking as “hanging out.”
- Many of the lessons on proper internet use reflect the lessons we teach youth about how to treat each other and themselves offline
  - Respect
  - Consideration for others
  - Safety



# Acknowledgments/Funders



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