

Social Media: Disconnect to Reconnect Activity

With a surge of recent research into the detrimental effects of screen time, social media, and the increase correlation to depression and anxiety, it's clear that there needs to be a change. This year Eagle Valley Middle School's No Place for Hate Coalition identified this need and we created a school wide activity that attempted to give students, staff, and parents a glimpse into positives that can come from limiting social media use and taking back control of our lives.

"No Place for Hate is a self-directed program helping all of the stakeholders take the lead on improving and maintaining school climate so all students can thrive," explains the Anti-Defamation League's website. NP4H is a movement that now has 1600 schools across the country that are making their school a No Place for Hate School. At Eagle Valley Middle School the coalition is made up of approximately 30 student leaders and two sponsors, including our 6th grade math teacher and myself. One of the steps to become a designated No Place for hate school is to design and implement three school-wide anti-bias or bullying prevention activities. The activity Disconnect to Reconnect was meant to not only give students, staff, and parents a social media break, but also bring awareness to this issue, increase face to face interactions, and help stop some of the cyber bullying that might be occurring.

On May 14th we asked our school community to commit to giving up social media for 5 days. During those 5 days, everyone that took the pledge was asked to do a daily reflection on the differences that they noticed. Programs like Offline October and Away For The Day inspired this activity. EVMS already practices Away for the Day by being a no phone zone during school hours. However, we are still seeing a need for a longer break. We offered a chance to win prizes as an incentive to get people to sign up. To our surprise, we had 110 students (about 1/3 of our school), 18 Staff, and 30 parents sign up. Though not all of the committed completed the 5 days, we did feel we were able to bring some awareness to this problem. Also, students noticed on how much more time they had when not using social media and they were able to get to bed earlier. Some actually admitted this activity helped them realize that they are addicted to social media. A few parents reported they were able to be more present with their family at night and have fewer distractions.

Throughout the 5 days we made a daily morning announcement that included research, encouragement, and tips on how to be successful in giving up social media. See below for our introduction announcement for Disconnect to Reconnect:

Attention students and staff. We are your no place for hate representatives. Today we want to ask you to please take a second and honestly ask yourself...Does snapchat, Instagram, or Facebook control your life? How many times a day do you check your social media accounts? Do you waste time looking down at your device instead of up at the people around you? Do you take random pictures just to keep your streaks alive? If this sounds like you, today is the day you can make

the decision to take back control of your life. Next Monday, May 14th, will be the start of Disconnect to Reconnect. Students, staff, and parents can make the commitment to give up social media for 5 full days. You deserve this break because you **MATTER**. We all know this won't be easy, but studies have found that teens who spent less than an hour per day on screen time are the happiest.

The issues surrounding social media can feel so overwhelming and scary at times. Though this activity may have only made a small impact at Eagle Valley Middle School, we will continue to try to make a difference and our hope is that next year others in the community will follow our lead and join us to disconnect to reconnect.



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