

## **Summary of Alberti Center Colloquium | November 6, 2025**

### ***Stuck in Our Screens: Bad Behavior, Social Drama, and Our Loss of Connection* presented by Kathleen P. Allen, PhD**

#### **Quick recap**

Dr. Kathleen Allen presented her book "Stuck in Our Screens" on social drama and its impact on society, particularly focusing on how adults engage in adolescent-like behaviors exacerbated by social media. The presentation explored broader societal trends including reality TV and the commodification of self through social media, while highlighting concerns about decreased social competencies, increased loneliness, and the potential for negative effects on mental health. The discussion concluded with recommendations for reducing screen time, promoting digital citizenship education, and fostering positive school cultures through empathy and kindness. Dr. Kathleen Allen, who recently retired from the Alberti Center as the training and evaluation specialist, is the author of "Stuck in Our Screens," published in May 2025.

#### **Summary of Presentation**

##### **Social Drama in Adult Society**

Dr. Allen presented her book on social drama and its impact on society, discussing how adults engage in adolescent-like behaviors and the role of social media in exacerbating these issues. She explained how her research shifted from focusing on adolescent social drama to examining broader societal trends, including the influence of reality TV and the commodification of self through social media. Dr. Allen highlighted the need to address these issues at a societal level rather than just focusing on children, and she plans to explore the effects of AI in a potential future book.

##### **Screen Impact on Human Development**

Dr. Allen discussed the impact of screens and social media on human development, highlighting concerns about decreased social competencies, increased loneliness, and the potential for negative effects on mental health. She emphasized the importance of critical thinking, active engagement with social media, and the need for face-to-face interactions. Dr. Allen also shared insights from various researchers and frameworks, such as the 40 developmental assets, and suggested ways to reduce screen time, including setting boundaries and promoting activities that foster social-emotional skills.

## **Social Media and AI Impact**

Dr. Allen delivered a thought-provoking presentation on the impact of social media and artificial intelligence, emphasizing the need for decentralized data collection and regulations beyond just protecting children. She highlighted the risks of relying too heavily on AI, citing concerns about intellectual development and cultural decline. Dr. Allen acknowledged her own hypocrisy in using social media to promote her book, acknowledging the challenges of selling books without a digital presence. Stephanie Frederick, the Associate Director of the Alberti Center, introduced herself and praised Dr. Allen's presentation for its shift in focus from adolescent social drama to broader societal issues. She mentioned a positive comment from Wendy McDowell about a high school civil conversations club, and introduced a question from Hannah Rapp about effective programs to reduce social media use.

## **Addressing Kids' Screen Time Impact**

Dr. Allen discussed the negative impacts of excessive phone and screen use on children, including weight gain, sleep disturbances, and reduced social skills. She recommended setting boundaries and modeling good behavior, suggesting that families consider reverting to landlines to improve social skills. Dr. Allen also highlighted the importance of digital citizenship education in schools to prevent cyberbullying and promote responsible online behavior. Stephanie emphasized the need for collaboration between parents and children in setting screen time rules and noted the importance of adult modeling in limiting phone use during family time. The conversation ended with a discussion on reducing drama in high schools, where Dr. Allen stressed the role of empathy and kindness in fostering a positive school culture.

## **Strategies for Reducing Screen Time**

Stephanie introduced a product mentioned in the chat called Tin Can, which offers free calls and landline options with parental controls, intended for children but also beneficial for adults. Dr. Allen discussed strategies to reduce adolescent screen time, emphasizing the importance of creating opportunities for physical group activities and setting collaborative phone-free times with parents and coaches. Stephanie highlighted a growing movement to delay children's access to cell phones and mentioned upcoming colloquium presentations on peer victimization and addressing bullying-related issues with parents.