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7 Effects of Technology Addiction on Kids (and How to Overcome It)



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Smartphones, tablets, or the Internet can be addictive because their use can trigger the release of the brain chemical dopamine to alter mood — which is exactly what drugs and alcohol do.

That's a pretty sobering thought, isn't it? (No pun intended.)

And just like with alcohol or drug use, you can rapidly build up tolerance so that it takes more and more time in front of these screens to derive the same pleasurable reward.

Compulsive use of electronic devices can interfere with your child's daily life, school or work, and relationships. When kids spend more time on social media or playing games than interacting with real people, or they can't stop themselves from repeatedly checking texts and social media apps, it is time to question whether things have gone too far.

7 Effects of Technology Addiction on Kids

1. **Increasing loneliness and depression.** While it may seem that losing yourself online will temporarily make feelings such as loneliness, depression, and boredom evaporate into thin air, it can actually make you feel even worse. A 2014 study found a correlation between high social media usage and depression and anxiety. Users, especially teens, tend to compare themselves unfavorably with their peers on social media, promoting feelings of loneliness and depression.
2. **Fueling anxiety.** One researcher found that the mere presence of a phone or other device nearby tends to make people more anxious and perform poorly on given tasks. The heavier the user, the greater anxiety experienced.
3. **Increasing stress.** Have you heard the term FOMO? It means Fear Of Missing Out. Teens feel the pressure to always be connected, never out of touch from their friends. This need to continually check and respond to texts and other social media messages can contribute to higher stress levels and inability to focus on tasks such as school work.
4. **Exacerbating attention deficit disorders.** The constant stream of messages and information from an electronic device can overwhelm the brain and make it impossible to focus attention on any one thing for more than a few minutes without feeling compelled to move on to something else.
5. **Diminishing your ability to concentrate and think deeply or creatively.** The persistent buzz, ping, or beep of your device can distract you from important tasks, slow your work, and interrupt those quiet moments that are so crucial to creativity and problem solving. Instead of ever being alone with our thoughts, we're now always online and connected.
6. **Disturbing your sleep.** Excessive technology use can disrupt your sleep, which can have a serious impact on your overall mental health. It can impact your memory, affect your ability to think clearly, and reduce your cognitive and learning skills.
7. **Encouraging self-absorption.** A UK study found that people who spend a lot of time on social media are more likely to display negative personality traits such as narcissism.

Snapping endless selfies, posting all your thoughts or details about your life can create an unhealthy sense of self-centeredness, distancing you from real-life relationships and making it harder to cope with stress.

5 Ways to Help Kids Overcome Technology Addictions

1. **Set goals for when your child can use his or her electronic devices.** For example, you might schedule use for only certain times of day, or you could reward your teen with a certain amount of time on his phone once he's completed a homework assignment or finished a chore, for instance.
2. **Replace time spent on electronic devices with healthier activities.** If your child is bored and lonely, resisting the urge to use her smartphone to play games or check social media can be very difficult. Have some suggestions for other ways to fill the time, such as reading a book or chatting with friends face-to-face.
3. **Remove social media apps from your child phone so he or she can only check Facebook, Twitter and the like from a shared family computer.** Remind them that what they see of others on social media is rarely an accurate reflection of their lives - people exaggerate the positive aspects of their lives, brushing over the doubts and disappointments that we all experience.
4. **Limit checks.** If your child compulsively checks her phone every few minutes, help her ease off by limiting her checks to once every 15 minutes, even to the point of setting a timer, if necessary. Increase to 30 minutes and even 60 minutes in time.
5. **Help your child curb his or her fear of missing out.** They need to accept that by limiting smartphone use, they're likely going to miss out on certain conversations, breaking news, or new gossip. There is so much information available on the internet it's almost impossible to stay on top of everything anyway.

The most important part to remember in all of this is that *you are the parent*, and as such, you're going to have to be the "bad guy" sometimes. I've yet to meet a teen (especially the two living in my house) who smilingly goes along with restrictions on his or her technology usage, but isn't protecting our children's mental health just as important as protecting their physical health?

So I just tell mine I'm following "doctor's orders" and that's that!