

TECHNOLOGY AND TEENS

We all know that the digital age has provided access to information and facilitated important life-saving and life-enhancing advancements in ways we never imagined possible. As with most things, with the good, comes the not-so-good. Finding the right balance (again, as with most things) is the often-elusive key.

The mental health community continues to debate whether technology overuse is a true “addiction” and how it might be related to other psychological issues and conditions. Yet very few disagree that an array of serious problems can surface that stem from our seemingly constant use of devices.



According to a recent Common-Sense Media Survey (2019), American tweens and teens are spending an average of 6-9 hours a day texting, gaming, browsing social media, and posting on multiple networks. Not surprisingly, technology overuse interferes with school, relationships, family time, sleep habits, and has been linked to stress, loneliness, depression, poor physical health, obesity, familial conflict, and delayed independence in young adults.

Teens themselves believe there's a problem. In the same Common-Sense Survey, half of the teens reported “feeling addicted” to their mobile device, and three-quarters feel compelled to respond to texts and other notifications immediately. Half of the teens in the survey indicated that they preferred texting or interacting through a digital device over talking directly to people who are right in front of them! They further admit that technology is keeping them up at night and distracting them from homework.

Even more concerning is that 45% of teens in the study said they are online “almost constantly,” and nine out of ten teens think that the preoccupation with technology is a significant problem for them. Our modern-day challenge, then, is helping our youth learn the **self-discipline** and **discernment** necessary to appropriately engage both on and off-line to form strong relationships with people and the world around them.

Warning Signs of Teen Tech Overuse:

- ✓ Obsessed with technology and can't seem put down device or walk away easily when first asked to do so
- ✓ Unrealistic about how much time one spends on technology
- ✓ Makes excuses for use
- ✓ Use of technology interferes with everyday activities (sleep, school, social activities, engaging with family, doing chores, cleaning up after self, paying attention to pets, eating regular meals, etc.)
- ✓ Becomes irritable or angry when asked to do without technology
- ✓ Preoccupied throughout the day about what to share, post, look-up or watch next
- ✓ Information obtained from non-news technology interfaces (YouTube, Tick Tock, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) is often the central topic of discussion or source for initiating conversations
- ✓ Being without Wi-Fi (or even the thought of it) causes genuine discomfort and anxiety
- ✓ Using technology is the first thing one does or thinks of in the morning and the last thing one does or thinks of at night

If your teen exhibits several of the signs outlined above, start by talking with your child about your concerns and setting time limits and expectations for your teen's technology use. If problems persist, a mental health professional can help.

