



## **SOCIAL MEDIA, PHONE USAGE AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH**

The recent resilience talk to KS4 parents highlighted the frustrations we experience as parents when trying to help our children limit their screen time. This is a subject that has been written about extensively in the media and much research has been published on the impact of blue light and excessive social media usage on mental and emotional well-being in adolescence.

For those of you who may wish to look at the published articles on this subject, here are a few:

How technology messes up your sleep:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2016-10-21/how-technology-use-messes-with-your-sleep/7950336>

5 ways in which social media affects teen mental health:

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/ways-social-media-affects-teen-mental-health-4144769>

Telegraph-sleep deprived teenagers:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/7976621/Sleep-deprived-teenagers-triple-chances-of-mental-illness-by-spending-nights-online.html>

To read about a Guardian experiment on teens living without social media:

<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jun/18/can-teenagers-survive-without-social-media>

### **What are the headlines when it comes to our children's mobile phone usage in particular?**

- The more they go on their phones, the more distressed they become.
- Just the sight of a mobile phone can send a child into threat state.
- Teenagers who spend 5 or more hours a day on electronic devices are over 70% more likely to have a risk factor for suicide than those who spend one hour a day.
- Young people who use screens at night are 52% more likely to sleep less than 7 hours a night, which is a significant amount of sleep deprivation with consequences for mental health.
- The more time children spend on social media, the more likely they are to be depressed or lonely.
- Blue light is especially good at preventing the release of melatonin, a hormone associated with bedtime and sleepiness.
- During adolescence, the circadian rhythm shifts, and teens feel more awake later at night. Going on a screen just before bedtime, will push sleepiness even later.
- Most teenagers are sleep deprived.

- Over 50% of teenagers said they “could not live without their phones” .
- A 2009 survey found up to 45% of US companies are now checking job applicants' activity on social networking sites, and 35% reported rejecting people because of what they found. Universities and colleges, similarly, are starting to look online.

The reality is that mobile phones have added huge value to our lives and do not cause mental and emotional distress in isolation. However, the screen usage at night-time is a real issue and has contributed to record levels of anxiety disorders and loneliness among UK teenagers.

Time Magazine printed the following: “**Instagram is the worst social media network for mental health and wellbeing**, according to a recent survey of almost 1,500 teens and young adults. While the photo-based platform got points for self-expression and self-identity, it was also associated with high levels of anxiety, depression, bullying and FOMO, or the fear of missing out.”

There are certainly some benefits associated with social networking e.g. positive scores for self-identity, self-expression, community building and emotional support. But they received negative marks as well, especially for sleep quality, bullying, body image and FOMO, and were associated with increases in depression and anxiety.

### What are some of the things that might help parents help their children?

- Agree to a plan as a family and put a written reminder up in the kitchen for all to see or get your child to make a poster about it or print one out. An example:



- Read this together with your child:

<https://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-topics/teens-and-sleep>

It can be a real motivator when you look at the consequences of too little sleep and that one of them is acne and skin conditions.

- Buy your child a funky alarm clock (or one for £3 on amazon).
- All family members to charge their phones in the same place overnight at the same time.
- Recognise that your child will have separation anxieties and remind them that their messages and notifications will still be there in the morning. Remind them that this move takes courage and strength and that you are proud of them - it is, after all, an act of self-compassion.
- Encourage them to design a new bedtime routine and help them stick to it. The brain loves repetition.
- Buy them a journal (one that they would love to own). Get them to write their worries down before bedtime.
- Encourage all family members to have phones off the tables at meal times.
- Focus on "no phone periods" rather than specific hours. Such as, no phones at mealtimes, at Grandma's house, at breakfast time, at bedtime.
- Treat them like an adult, not an adult in progress. Talk to them about their phone usage when you are both calm, and not when things have got out of hand.
- Invest in an IPOD and put some audio books or podcasts on it
- If you have a fitbit in the family, look at sleep times in the morning and time awake. Begin to help your child understand the correlation between constantly checking the phone (average of 42 times an hour screen refreshing) and their levels of anxiety.
- Print off a sleep questionnaire, e.g.  
<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/SleepDiaryv6.pdf>
- Buy a good book.
- Suggest that your child informs best friends that they will be offline until agreed time in the morning.