

Screentime for Adolescents

Tablets, smart phones and handheld gaming devices are imbedded throughout the routine of our day. The uptake of mobile device use has been faster than the medical community has been able to research the effects. The media usually highlights the negatives of adolescents' mobile device use, but there are also some benefits. Below, we have highlighted a few possible outcomes being revealed in literature.

The Good

- **Connecting/building relationships:** Adolescents who are in a minority group at their school and are connected by social media with adolescents that share similarities with them have shown decreased symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- **Reinforcing positive behavior:** Time on mobile device is highly motivating for adolescents and can be used to reinforce behavior. An example of this is, "When you complete your homework, you may have your cell phone."
- **Increasing access to mental health tools:** Relaxation apps such as Koi Pond or Guided Meditation increase the accessibility to tools that may improve mental health.
- **Learning:** When evidenced-based approaches are used, apps have been shown to increase learning, especially for rote memorization.
- **Distraction:** During an unpleasant experience, such as a medical procedure, mobile devices are effective for distraction and make the experience less traumatic.

The Bad

- **Mobile device problematic use:** Pervasive mobile device use can interfere with in-person interactions, and to some, when mobile devices are removed, the users experience significant anxiety as if having withdrawal. Mobile device problematic use can then be impairing when the mobile device is present or not.
- **Poor academic performance:** Mobile device use displaces time for other activities. This includes studying. In the study, the students with more mobile device problematic use, studied less and had worse grades.
- **Sleep disruption:** Mobile device use displaces sleep time as well. Looking at screens suppresses the natural release of melatonin which is an important biological signal that regulates the initiation of sleep.
- **Cyberbullying:** Mobile devices provide another tool for bullies to use that can be anonymous and cause bullying to occur 24/7.

Understanding this, parents have been given the almost impossible task of allowing their teen access to the good effects of mobile device use but trying to protect from the bad.

Here are a few tools for parents:

- **Educate yourself:** Try to understand the media that your adolescent is using. Commonsensemedia.org can be referenced if questions arise about media.
- **Make a family media use plan:** To target the problem of media overuse, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends creating a family media use plan.
 - www.HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan
 - Be the example of appropriate media use for your teen

- **Monitor your adolescent's use:** Many products such as Qustodio or Symantec Norton Family Premier are available to monitor amount of time and use of time on the device. Adolescents want privacy and independence but monitoring use is important for safety concerns and understanding the extent of their use. The extent of monitoring may look different for a freshman as opposed to a senior.
- **Limit use:** Because mobile device use displaces time for studying and sleeping, access to mobile devices should be limited to times of the day when this does not interfere with these activities. Monitoring products mentioned above have parent-controlled timed locks. Also, some households have limits on allowing mobile devices in bedrooms at night to discourage use at night.

Mobile device use is pervasive, and offers some benefits, and some risks. Families can employ strategies to help balance these benefits and risks within their own families.

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