



Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.



Click here to print a PDF of this article so you can start a conversation with your child



Building a Drug-Free Future

Know! If You Have A Smartphone Addiction

Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

[Know! encourages you to share this Parent Tip with friends and family.](#)

Learn more at: DrugFreeActionAlliance.org

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Drug Free Action Alliance



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We jokingly talk about our children (and maybe ourselves) being addicted to our smartphones, but in reality, it is no laughing matter. Cell phone addiction is real and can be destructive to the lives of those who truly cannot control their use.

Ever heard of “nomophobia”? It’s the fear of having **no mobile** phone, as in accidentally leaving it at home or the battery dying with no charger in sight. There are people who simply cannot function “normally” without having their phone on them. Similar to drugs, smartphone use can trigger the release of dopamine, the chemical that controls the brain’s reward and pleasure center and alters a person’s mood. And just like alcohol and other drugs, tolerance can quickly build, causing one to need even more screen time to experience that same pleasurable reward.

New research released by Common Sense Media tells us that parents of teens and tweens are now spending as much time on their phones as their children. About 60% of these parents believe their teens are addicted to their phones, but less than 30% of these same parents believe themselves to be addicted. In this same study, 56% of parents admit to checking their mobile devices while driving in the car with their children, while 51% of teens say they witness it. Dangerous in so many ways!

Smartphone (or internet) addiction is about impulse-control – which we know is not a strongpoint for tweens/teens – and apparently, many adults as well. Smartphones can be helpful and fun in a variety of ways, and spending time on them is perfectly ok – until it’s too much.

But how much is too much? According to health experts, it becomes a problem when virtual relationships take precedence over real-world relationships; when one struggles to complete tasks at school, work or home because of time spent online; when a person begins concealing his/her amount of smartphone use or gets extremely irritated when their online activity is interrupted; when there is constant fear of missing out on something if not online; if the person experiences phantom vibrations from a text or update that did not actually occur; and of

course it's a problem if a person is willing to risk their safety or the safety of others for a peek at their digital updates.

Consider these questions, adapted by HelpGuide.org, to determine your level of dependency on your digital device(s):

1. Do you absent-mindedly pass the time by using your phone even when there are better things to do?
2. Do you lose track of time when on your phone?
3. Do you spend more time on your phone than talking to real people face-to face?
4. Do you wish you could be less connected to your phone?
5. Do you regularly sleep with your smartphone ON, next to your bed?
6. Do you use your phone at all hours of the day/night—even when it means interrupting other things?
7. Do you use your phone while driving or doing other activities that require your focused attention?
8. Are you reluctant to be without your smartphone, even for a short time?
9. Do you ALWAYS have your smartphone with you and feel anxious if you accidentally leave it at home?
10. When you eat meals is your smartphone always a part of the table place setting?
11. When your phone buzzes do you feel an intense urge to check for texts, tweets, updates, etc.?
12. Do you find yourself mindlessly checking your phone multiple times a day even when you know there is likely nothing new or important to see?

While there are no set guidelines to determine if a person has a smartphone addiction, there are certainly behaviors that can signal a problem. If you (or your child) answered yes to four or more of the questions above, it may be time to take action to break your digital habit. If you aren't able to stick to the limits you set for yourself, striking a healthy life balance, there are experts who can help.

** Contact your family physician for treatment information and guidance.*

Sources: CommonSenseMedia.org: [Dealing with Devices – The Parent-Teen Dynamic](#). May 2016. [CNN](http://CNN.com): [Kelly Wallace - How much time do parents spend on screens? As much as their teens](#). Dec 2016. HelpGuide.org: [Smartphone Addiction - Tips for Breaking Free of Compulsive Smartphone Use](#).

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