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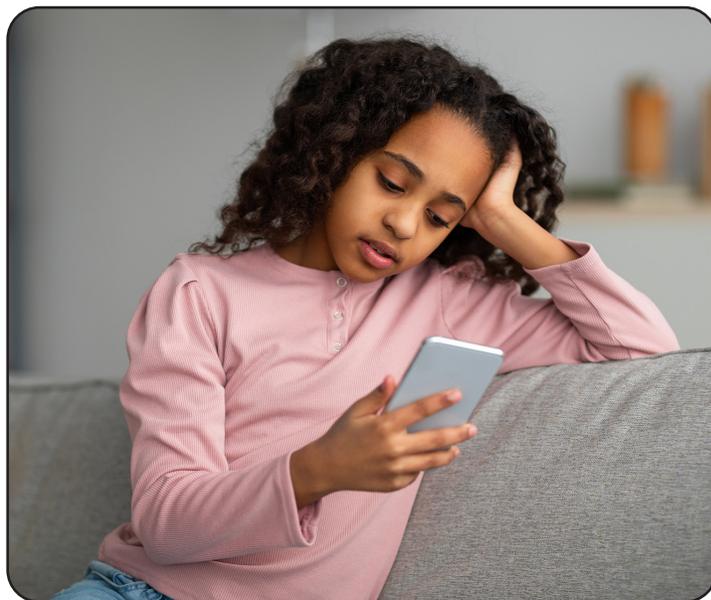
Smartphones May Lead to Mental Health Problems in Children

by Summer Stanley

Emerging studies on the use of smartphones in children and young teens are giving parents and teachers some alarming statistics.

According to researchers from San Diego State University and the University of Georgia:

-  Children as young as 2 are suffering anxiety and depression because of how much time they spend on smartphones.
-  Adolescents spending more than 7 hours a day on screens are twice as likely to have been diagnosed with anxiety or depression as opposed to those who spent only an hour.
-  Children under 5 who spend several hours a week in front of a screen are twice as likely to lose their temper often—and are 46% more prone to not being able to calm down when excited.
-  Among 14- to 17-year-olds, more than 42.2% of those in the study who spent more than seven hours a day on screens did not finish tasks.
-  About 9% of 11- to 13-year-olds who spent an hour with screens daily were not curious or interested in learning new things.
-  Eighth-graders who spend 6-10 hours a week on social media increase their risk of depression by 27%, while those who play sports, go to religious services, or even do homework more than the average teen cut their risk significantly.



Results from the “Monitoring the Future” survey funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse showed the issue in simple terms: All screen activities are linked to less happiness and all non-screen activities are linked to more happiness.

However, the reasons behind this finding are many and varied. One issue is the feeling of being left out. While teens are spending less time together in person, when they do hang out, they often document the event on social media. A teen who feels left out sees how much fun their fellow teens appear to be having and feels even more ostracized.

Cyberbullying is also on the rise; 22% of girls and 10% of boys said they had been cyberbullied in the past year. From 2012-2015, girls’ depression increased by 50%, and boys’ depression increased by 21% partially as a result of cyberbullying.

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With these statistics in mind, it's clear that less screen time is better for children and teens. Brain scans from a National Institutes of Health study show that children who spend more than 7 hours a day on screens experience premature thinning of the cortex. That study is ongoing—over the next decade, researchers will follow more than 11,000 children as they grow up around screens.

In the meantime, it's a good idea to limit the amount of time children and teens spend on their smartphones and online. The American Academy of Pediatrics' recommendations for screen time are:

- None for children younger than 18 months
- 1 hour or less per day for children 2-5 years old
- For children 6 and up, place consistent limits on screen time and make sure it doesn't replace adequate sleep and physical activity

Too much screen time also leads to less sleep. According to the Child Mind Institute, teens who spent 3+ hours a day on electronic devices were 28% more likely to get inadequate sleep, and teens who visited social media sites every day were 19% more likely to get inadequate sleep.

Lack of sleep can negatively affect teens' mood, ability to think, to react, to regulate their emotions, to learn, and to get along with adults. It's a vicious cycle—lack of sleep affects mood, and depression can lead to lack of sleep. And multiple studies have found that severe sleep deprivation is linked to suicidal ideation.

Resources:

"Smartphones and tablets are causing mental health problems in children," accessed Jan. 2, 2019, from https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-6346349/Smartphones-tablets-causing-mental-health-problems-children-young-two.html?ito=email_share_article-top

"Have smartphones destroyed a generation?" accessed Jan. 7, 2019, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/>

"Smartphones and Social Media," accessed Jan. 14, 2019, from <https://childmind.org/report/2017-childrens-mental-health-report/smartphones-social-media/>

"The first long-term study on how screen time affects children's brains suggest more than 2 hours a day could do damage," accessed Jan. 16, 2019, from <https://www.thisinsider.com/how-screen-time-affects-childrens-brains-nih-study-2018-12>

"AAP announces new recommendations for children's media use," accessed Jan. 29, 2019, from <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/American-Academy-of-Pediatrics-Announces-New-Recommendations-for-Childrens-Media-Use.aspx>

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