

ARE CHILDREN ADDICTED TO TECHNOLOGY

A mere 20 years after the Internet was founded, people do not yet know how the explosion in digital connectivity is shaping society. It seems in today's world children are born "digital." From young toddlers to teens, children appear to have a knack of being able to navigate the world of technology using a range of devices and much of their interpersonal development has been transferred into the online world. Along with the multitude of benefits technology brings, there has been widening concern over the time children spend with technology and the type of interactions children are having through technology.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Canadian Society of Pediatrics state infants aged 0-2 years should not have any exposure to technology, 3-5 years be restricted to one hour per day, 6-18 years restricted to 2 hours per day (AAP 2013, CPS 2010). Handheld devices (cell phones, tablets, electronic games) have dramatically increased the accessibility and usage of technology, especially by very young children.

In 2010, a Kaiser Family Foundation study found that US youth ages 8 to 18 spent more than 7 and a half hours a day using technology and media. With increased availability of devices to children at younger ages and more apps, games, and media attractions, the use of technology and media by youth has only continued to increase.

In July 2015, as covered on several news stations, the question has been asked – "are children addicted to technology," and there is now open discussion on the subject. For the purposes of this discussion there is a need to define technology addiction. Like other addictions, this addiction is the use the Internet that leads to interpersonal problems, the exclusion of participation in other activities, and an overly emotional attachment to the Internet, a game, a set of games, or a cellphone.

Technology addiction displays physical, emotions, and/or behavioral characteristics. The Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of mental Disorders V (DSM-V), sometimes called the psychiatrist's "bible," has not officially added Internet gaming to its roster of disorders, but it's under consideration. And, it's likely that iPad, smartphones, or other device addiction will be viewed similarly.

SIGNS OF TECHNOLOGY ADDICTION: A parent can detect the signs of technology addiction.

- Observe how much time your child spends using the Internet or a cellphone in addition to use for school assignments.
- Using technology, a social media site, or playing a game for an excessive amount of time.
- Using technology as an escape.
- Loss of interest in other activities.
- Expressing feelings that social media friends are more important than family or other people.
- Demanding to have the newest and latest technology as soon as it is available.
- Observing your child using the cellphone to access the Internet at meals, while using the toilet, and waking up to check messages or websites

- Seeing your child's relationship with you, siblings, and friends in the neighborhood or school become less important than a particular game, website, or social media site.
- Observing deterioration in your child's performance at school.
- Look for signs of euphoria while using technology.
- Anger, depression, withdrawal, and restlessness when not using technology.
- Catching your child lying about the amount of time spent using technology.
- Finding your child stealing to buy the next version of a game or a particular set of software needed for his/her phone or PC.
- Experimentation with illegal drugs, prescription drugs, sex, or alcohol. All addictions have the same chemical basis in the brain and one addiction that establishes the chemical pathway can potentially lead to other addictive behaviors.

CONTROL & TREATMENT

- Set time limits and physical boundaries for screen use, i.e. not in the bedroom or at the dinner table
- Talk to your child about using technology and about Internet safety.
- Limit the age you get a cellphone for your child.
- If talking does not work, you can use a time limiting device or application.
- As a parent, engage your child in social activities that do not include technology.
- Child psychologists and pediatricians, as well as addiction experts, have noted a similarity between excessive and escapist use of technology and other forms of addiction. If necessary, you can have your child treated for excessive technology use issues.
- Treatment is covered by most insurances. There are in-house programs that offer treatment for children and adolescents that are addicted to using technology. A growing number of psychologists and physicians have become aware of the problem and have developed options that treat your child to cope without technology (<http://www.netaddiction.com/articles/symptoms.pdf>).

REFERENCES, RESOURCES TO CONTACT & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Internet Addiction The New Mental Health Disorder (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2012/10/02/the-new-mental-health-disorder-internet-addiction/>)
- Are Children Consuming Too Much Digital Technology? (<http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/children-consuming-too-much-digital-technology>)
- Quirky Kid: Technology Addiction and Young People (<http://childpsychologist.com.au/technology-addition-and-young-people/>)
- Parenting, Addictions, and Technology (<http://www.rosslaird.com/blog/parenting-addictions-and-technology/>)
- Technology Addiction – Detection, Treatment, and Control (<http://nobullying.com/technology-addiction-detection-treatment-and-control/>)
- 7 Signs Your Child Is an iPad Addict (<http://www.livescience.com/40680-signs-kids-addiction-to-ipad.html>)
- 10 Reasons Why Handheld Devices Should Be Banned for Children Under the Age of 12 (<http://movingtolearn.ca/2014/ten-reasons-why-hand-held-devices-should-be-banned-for-children-under-the-age-of-12>)
- (<http://www.parenting.com/blogs/children-and-technology-blog/jeana-lee-tahnk/what-best-age-get-your-kid-cell-phone>)