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Date: _____

Do you have a cell phone addiction?

Teenage Cell Phone Addiction: Are You Worried About Your Child?

At what point does reliance on and use of cell phones and the Internet turn into an addiction? What you can do to help your kids avoid developing an addiction?

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It's no big secret that teens have a complex relationship with technology. They are expected to use technology both in and out of the classroom to make the grade, they manage their social lives through various apps and social media platforms, and they use technology to stay organized and on top of their many, many activities. Today's teens face intense levels of pressure. Sometimes their phone use is tied to recreational activity and can help them relieve stress, but other times they use their phones to keep up with their busy lives. Ensuring that kids' technology use doesn't result in more stress for them isn't an easy task; there's no clean-cut way to delete stressful technology activity. So how can parents, let alone kids themselves, navigate the often stressful world of tech?

Although there isn't a recognized "smartphone addiction" diagnosis, it's natural for parents to wonder if a teen's apparent obsession with a smartphone qualifies as addictive behavior. After all, it can be incredibly frustrating to attempt to hold a conversation with someone when they can't peel their eyes away from their phone.

Teen Cell Phone Addiction: The Stats

As it turns out, parents have reason to worry. Results of a 2016 Common Sense Media Report found that 50 percent of teens "feel addicted" to mobile devices, while 59 percent of parents surveyed believe that kids are addicted to their devices. This survey also showed that 72 percent of teens and 48 percent of parents feel the need to immediately respond to texts, social-networking messages, and other notifications; 69 percent of parents and 78 percent of teens check their devices at least hourly.

A 2018 Pew Research Report showed that 45 percent of teens said they use the Internet "almost constantly," and another 44 percent said they go online several times a day. According to this report, 50 percent of teenage girls are "near-constant" online users, compared to 39 percent of teenage boys. 95 percent of teens have access to a smartphone.

Given that teens use their smartphones for a variety of reasons, both personal and academic (often simultaneously), it helps to focus less on counting the minutes of use and more on how they use their smartphones. Parents hear a lot about the importance of teaching balance, but part of evaluating for a

healthy balance lies in understanding how teens actually use their phones and what purpose that use serves them. YouTube, for example, can be both recreational and academic.

Recognizing the Symptoms of Cell Phone and Internet Addiction

A 2016 report published in *Frontiers in Psychiatry* suggests using the DSM-5 criteria for compulsive gambling and substance abuse to measure problematic smartphone use. While problematic smartphone use is not defined as an addiction, it can be evaluated as a behavioral disorder.

Using this model, potential symptoms might include the following:

Conscious use in prohibited contexts or potentially dangerous situations (e.g. texting while driving)
Excessive use that causes conflicts with family; withdrawing from family or shared events in favor of smartphone use
Negative effects on school, family, social, or emotional functioning
Continued excessive use despite negative effects
Impulsive, frequent, constant checking of phone, even in short bursts (feels strong need to check every few minutes)
Insomnia or sleep disturbances related to frequent checking
Excessive urgency or need to be connected
Increase in use to achieve satisfaction or counteract dysphoric (sad) mood
Need to respond immediately to messages and alerts
Increased anxiety and/or irritability if phone is not accessible
Feelings of unease when unable to use the phone

It can be difficult to distinguish between normal (or slightly elevated) daily use and problematic use. It helps to ask yourself the following questions:

Does my teen become angry, irritable, anxious, or even violent when the phone is taken away or unable to be used?

Does my teen skip or avoid social events or extracurricular activities to use the smartphone instead?

Is my teen's personal care (hygiene), friendships, family relationships, or school work negatively affected by smartphone use?

Does smartphone use interfere with my teen's normal sleep routine?

Are there any major changes in my teen's eating habits that can't otherwise be explained?

Are there any major changes in mood that can't otherwise be explained?

