Parenting, Media, and Everything In Between

What Parents Need to Know About Technology Addiction

A typical teen's day includes up to nine hours of texting, gaming, watching videos, and posting on multiple social networks -- even while doing homework. It's enough to make you wonder: Is my kid addicted to technology? By Michael Robb 5/2/2016

Topics: **Technology Addiction**

Look around, and it's easy to see how media and technology have changed our day-to-day lives, even compared to a decade ago. We bring our devices with us everywhere and depend on them for work, school, play, and our social lives. But what are the downsides to this "always connected" lifestyle -- especially for kids?

To find answers to these questions -- and, more importantly, to help families create a healthy digital lifestyle -- Common Sense examines the latest scientific research about problematic media use in our new report, *Technology Addiction: Concern, Controversy, and Finding Balance*. Along with the report, we're releasing the results of a poll, *Dealing with Devices: The Parent-Teen Dynamic*, which asks teens and parents how they feel about the technology in their lives.

What we determined is that problematic media use is a growing issue, but true technology addiction -- while associated with very serious repercussions -- may be a real risk for only a vulnerable few. The report reveals large gaps in research on technology addiction. For example, when does problematic media use become harmful? And if people aren't actually addicted, what's going on -- and how can parents help? Much of the existing research was conducted with college students and adults, not specifically with children. To understand how media use affects kids as they grow, we need much better research. Here's what we know now:

Highlights from the poll:

- Half of teens and over one-quarter of parents feel they're addicted to their mobile devices.
- At least a few times a week, more than three-quarters of parents and 41 percent of teens feel the other gets distracted by a device and doesn't pay attention when they're trying to talk.
- Seventy-two percent of teens and 48 percent of parents feel the need to immediately respond to texts, social-networking messages, and other notifications.
- Despite conflicts, most parents feel their teens' use of mobile devices has made no difference or has even helped their relationship.

And findings from the report:

- **Internet addiction is potentially serious**. There is no agreement on whether it's a true addiction, how to measure it, or whether it's something that is highly related to or even caused by another disorder, such as depression or ADHD. However, "Internet gaming disorder," which involves excessive online gaming, may be included by the American Psychiatric Association in the next version of the *DSM* (the resource used to diagnose mental and psychiatric disorders).
- **Multitasking may be harming our ability to stay focused**. And "multitasking" is actually a misnomer; we may think we're doing multiple things simultaneously, but we're actually rapidly shifting our attention between individual tasks. Research shows that multitasking can hurt your ability to get things done, slow you down, and make it harder to remember things that happened while you were multitasking.
- **Media and technology use is a source of friction for many families**. Many children feel their parents check their devices too often, and a large number of parents struggle with limiting their children's use of media and technology.

While there are no easy answers, we do know parents can have a huge impact on how kids use media. The challenge is figuring out how to get the most from technology without letting it get out of control. By taking a balanced approach to media and technology -- setting screen limits, establishing device-free zones, and reducing multitasking -- you can help your whole family develop healthy media habits.

About Michael Robb

Michael Robb is director of research at Common Sense, overseeing our research program, evaluation of organization impact, and program development research. Michael has been involved in issues involving media and... Read more

---

RELATED ADVICE & TOP PICKS

Family TV Shows to Watch

Sibling Wat...