

# **A Parent's Guide to Smartphone and Social Media Addiction**

**From the author of the book *Unsocial Media;  
Virtual World Causing Real World Anxiety*  
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*Addiction to smartphones and social media is equivalent to an addiction to a drug like heroin or ecstasy. If your child does not have their own cellphone yet, the longer you wait the better. Your decision should be based on need rather than want, and how self-disciplined and responsible your child is. It can be a major distraction, cause friction in the household and become a serious threat to their mental health.*

**Wade Sorochan**

**Smartphones and Social media are addictive** and like any other addiction it can control your child and become a major distraction from the real world and the most important thing in their life. Determine how much technology is too much, set limits, and balance technology use with other real-world activities to protect their mental health and build social skills.

Setting limits will allow your child to have control over it and balance their world. As a parent, it's vital for you to monitor their use at all times. The biggest challenge with controlling your child's smartphone use is the strong resistance from your child, it can be relentless and wear a parent down; getting over

the first hurdle is always the hardest. Don't give in to the addiction. Be vigilant and do what's best for their mental health--don't cave to peer or societal pressure. Your child *will* resist, and you may experience guilt feelings about your child being "different" from their friends---but, do you want to do what's right, or what's popular? The decisions you make and rules you enforce today will empower your child and create a strong foundation for their future. You may also experience a strong dislike for your child at times due to their smartphone addiction. When they strongly resist and become argumentative and possibly disrespectful, turning your home into a "war zone," it's important for them to know that you dislike their *behaviour* but still love them as your child.

**TIP:** No devices when with others: dinner time should be family time. Family meals can create feelings of closeness, security and overall comfort. Researchers note that children tend to communicate more at the dinner table allowing parents a good opportunity to connect with their children. So, turn off any distractions like the TV and all cellphones. This will allow for all family members to share and connect. The same applies to going out for dinner, driving, bedtime or any social gathering. This will help all to be engaged in the moment.

**TIP:** For extreme smartphone and social media addiction, experts caution not to go cold turkey, a drastic or sudden reduction in technology use with a child can result in them feeling alienated from something that became an important purpose and meaning in their life. Allow online activity as a reward for real world family activity and responsibilities. Create an atmosphere that will entice your child to want to engage more in the real world than the virtual world. With any addiction, a person will not deal with it until they admit to being addicted. Most teens won't admit to being addicted, or if they do admit it, they don't take it seriously enough to take action to break the addiction. Here are some indicators that your child may be addicted:

- 1.** Always having their phone in their hand.
- 2.** Withdrawal feelings when they're unable to use their phone.
- 3.** Feeling a sense of attachment to their phone as if nothing else matters more.
- 4.** Obsessively checking for missed calls, emails, texts and responses to social media posts.
- 5.** Built up anxiety when they don't receive an expected amount of responses to their social media posts.
- 6.** Missing out on opportunities for face-to-face interactions.
- 7.** Using their phone in inappropriate places
- 8.** Unable to cutback on smartphone and social media use.

**“Unsocial” Media; The effects of social isolation** have been studied for years, and evidence shows that when our need for social relationships is not met, it can affect us mentally and physically. It can increase symptoms of anxiety and depression and cause poor physical health. Social media leads to isolation which could lead to mental health issues due to the lack of social and emotional connections.

Everyone needs alone time; a time to gather your own thoughts without distraction—It’s referred to as *“me time.”* Before social media, *“me time”* for a teen usually involved reading a book, listening to music or writing in a diary while alone in their bedroom. Social media has now become the new *“me time”* for teens which is causing a serious imbalance in life and FOMO, fear of missing out. Social media is so addictive and consuming for teens that they don’t even think about shutting it off to gather their *own* thoughts without distraction.

Allowing your child to have their own personal and emotional space is overall healthy for their development, but if your child is isolating themselves from the family on a regular basis to be on social media, that can cause serious mental health and family issues. If you’re a parent who is constantly fighting with your child over their smartphone use and lack of interest in family engagement and activities, you have probably had to deal with your child saying *“I need my space, it’s my room, get out!”* What if they said *“I need my drug fix, get out!”* How would you react? You wouldn’t allow drug use in their

bedroom---social media is “today’s drug of choice” and as a parent, you need to be vigilant in helping your child break the addiction.

**TIP:** Work with your child on limiting social media use and explain house rules for technology use and family interaction expectations. YOUR HOUSE—YOUR WIFI—YOUR RULES.

**Encouraging your child to identify feelings and emotions attached social media** will teach them to Identify any triggers that cause them to gravitate towards social media: seeking validation, attention or acceptance, lonely, bored, sad, or anxious. Most youth feel anxious waiting for responses to their social media posts, and many are never satisfied with the amount of responses, which can create an anxiety induced fixation to achieve more online responses---causing serious mental health issues.

**TIP:** Share how social media can cause or increase symptoms of sadness, loneliness, resentment, envy and anxiety and depression. Explain the benefits of face to face interaction and how only the real world can meet their emotional and social needs. Make the real world, rather than the virtual world, their default for emotional and social support.