

# EDUCATORS E-NEWS

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## Social Media Use and Screen Time

Children nowadays have a peerless battle that previous generations never had to deal with—the issue of social media and screen time. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, social media is defined as “websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking” (*Oxford University Press*, 2022). There are beneficial uses like communicating with friends and family, watching educational videos, or completing homework. However, there are also harmful uses, such as violent video games, pornography, cyberbullying, and more. An additional, and one of the more prevailing problems with social media, is the amount of time used on the devices. The amount of screen time that young adolescents spend has become a troubling issue in today’s tech-savvy era.

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Beyond the negative effect of lowered test scores, social media and screen time can play a large role in adolescent obesity, anxiety, depression, and sleep problems. Moreover, the time that is spent playing a video game, watching television, or browsing the Internet can contribute to learning disabilities and attention problems (Ben-Joseph, 2022). Fortunately, the impacts of screen time can be alleviated both at home and with teacher support.

# The Pervasiveness of Too Much Screen Time

There are different types of screen use seen among young adolescents and each has its own problems. If a child has a television or other electronic devices in their room this may affect their sleep. When children have a lack of sleep this causes a lack of physical development and mental health issues. Young adolescents arguably need 8-9 hours of sleep each night, however, if they are not getting this amount they can get brain fog, become extra moody, fall asleep in class, or lose the ability to pay attention in school. If a child has a portable device that they can bring with them to social situations this may affect their ability to socialize in face-to-face interactions. When children struggle with socializing, they tend to become reclusive, separating themselves from their peers and sometimes family in order to remain where they feel comfortable, on their devices. This is called social isolation which is solitude that is unhealthy and unwanted. According to a blog by Tulane University, when children do not have friends their age whom they can spend quality time with, they can become depressed, anxious, and develop low self-esteem. Tulane University, in their blog, "Understanding the Effects of Social Isolation on Mental Health," report that they have found multiple studies concerning social isolation and health.

**ISOLATION IS THE WORST POSSIBLE COUNSELOR.**

**- MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO**

## Studies on Screen Time by Tulane University

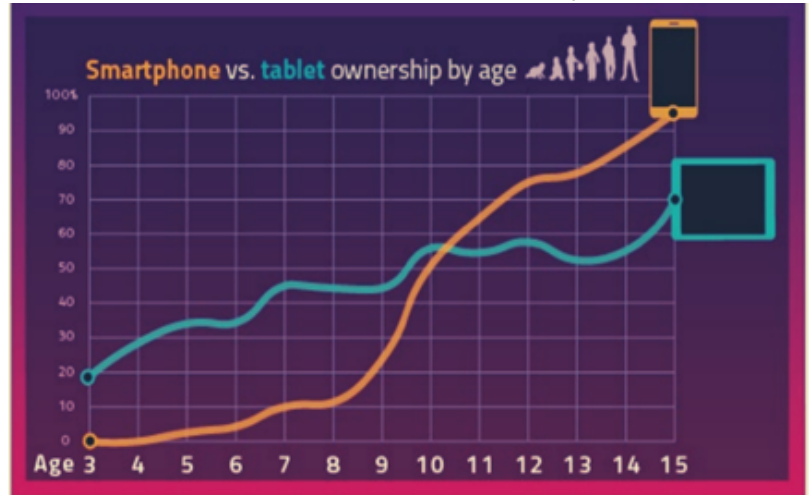
"A study led by an epidemiologist at Newcastle University concluded that deficiencies in social relationships are associated with a higher risk for coronary heart disease and stroke. A study published in The Journals of Gerontology concluded that loneliness was associated with a 40 percent increase in the risk of dementia. Links between social isolation and serious medical conditions are not fully understood, but ample evidence supports the connection. A study published in the American Journal of Epidemiology linked social isolation with higher risks of premature mortality. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) points to loneliness and isolation as serious public health risks."

Whether at home or in public, the time children spend on electronic devices can drastically affect their physical and mental health. Some parents/caregivers may think that their child does not fall into this statistic, that their child is not affected by their screen time, or that their child does not spend that much time on their devices. However, studies show that most young adolescents, children between the ages of 10-17, are affected significantly by social media and their screen time. According to a study done in 2019, "just under 70% of 12–15 year-olds in the UK have a social media profile, with over a third agreeing that they found it difficult to control their screen-time" (Barthorpe et al., 2020). These findings show us that the matter of social media and screen time is a ubiquitous concern among adolescents.

# Screen Time and Social Media Trends

"The proportion of children who own their own smartphones or tablets increases with age. Up until they turn ten, children are more likely to own tablets. However, between the ages of nine and ten, smartphone ownership doubles from 23% to 50% - representing an important milestone in children's digital independence as they prepare to transition to secondary school. At age 15, almost all children own their own smartphones." [Ofcom. (2020). (rep.). Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report 2019]

Smartphone vs. Tablet Ownership by Age

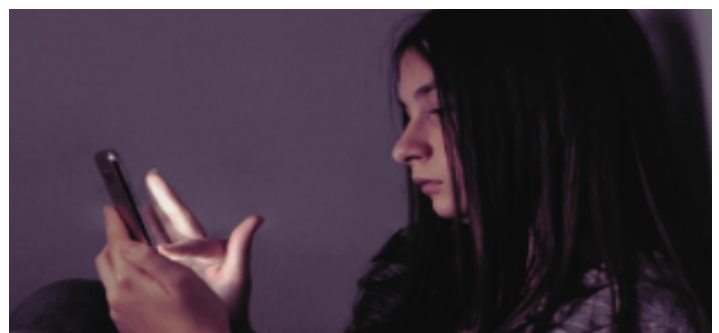


## The Impacts:

Adolescent brains are forever changing and maturing. During adolescence children can have severe mental delays if they are distracted in their learning process, and the surplus of screen time can cause children to suffer such delays in their social, motor, and language skills. Furthermore, there has been evidence to support the idea that screen time in children has caused developmental delays. One in four children show learning disabilities and delays within their development in schools (Madigan et al., 2019). In a study conducted by Dr. Sheri Madigan and her peers, higher levels of screen time in children between the ages of 24 to 36 months caused poor performance on achievement milestones (Madigan et al., 2019). Plus, parents have given their child the opportunity to gain access to screens at such a young age that it can prevent academic achievement for some.

## Why Awareness is Important...

Why should the amount of time that young adolescents spend on devices concern us, are they not simply emulating the technologically advancing world they live in? Screen time is a sedentary activity that decreases physical activity within an adolescent. Hence, it can impair several parts of the brain and can take a toll on one's body, as there is limited energy exerted during adolescents' screen time. In fact, there is a multitude of studies pointing to the fact that longer amounts of screen time in young adolescents are resulting in a rise in physical and mental health-related issues. Depression, for example, is "predicted to be among the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among adolescents" and researchers have attributed this rise in rates of internalizing problems to the amount of time children spend in front of digital screens (Boers et.al., 2019).



# Practical Help

- **TEACHERS CAN** create a more engaging environment using screens by incorporating polls in the classroom as a means of reflection for student engagement.
- **TEACHERS CAN** have voice threads to build on student's social relationships during class discussions or presentations.
- **TEACHERS SHOULD NOT** encourage students to use their phones during recess, and should promote healthy interaction between their peers instead.
- **PARENTS/CARETAKERS CAN** encourage their children to be more involved in after-school activities, such as sports, to be physically active.
- **PARENTS/CARETAKERS CAN** encourage their children to turn off their devices during meals and at least one hour before bed (Ben-Joseph, 2022).
- **PARENTS/CARETAKERS SHOULD NOT** allow students to sit in front of the television or browse the Internet for extended periods of time, instead they can use this time to engage in conversations with family.

A study done by the *Journal of Applied and Advanced Research* listed that the above methods of teaching can be a great way for students to have a more innovative way of learning. Technology has become the main method of teaching in schools, so why not use these tools to our advantage? By allowing students to develop their innovative mindset you can also enhance their social development as well.

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