



Technology Addictions

Acceptable play or too much?

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Some online statistics suggest that in America, children ages 8 to 18 are spending on average 44.5 hours per week in front of screens. This is the equivalent to time spent at a full time job. Electronics have replaced almost all areas of life as we know it. You can find children playing in the car, in restaurants, at school, and in some families it's just easier than having to deal with the meltdown that could ensue by saying "no" to their children.

At our practice, parents often ask us "how much time should my child be spending on their ipad per day?" I often ask parents "is that all the screen time your child gets in a day?" Usually, by the time parents add up time spent on the internet, Wii, PlayStation, cell phone, watching TV and any other devices, they realize that their children overall are spending way too much time in front of screens. In the past, that time used to be spent playing, using our imaginations, being active, doing art and ok some TV time as well. But now, the rates of screen time equal the same amount of time a child spends in school, leaving a minimal amount of time to really play.

One of the challenges we have seen is impaired sleep patterns due to late night log-ins. Teenagers typically stay up past normal bedtime hours and may report staying on-line until two, three, or four in the morning with the reality of having to wake for school at 6:00 a.m. Such sleep deprivation causes excessive fatigue, often making it difficult to function academically. Jessica (14 years old) reported that she can't turn off her computer until the very last of her friends goes offline. She reports that she doesn't want to miss anything and even if she turns off her

computer, she worries about what she is missing and stays up anyway. This lack of sleep can impair judgment, make concentrating at school a challenge, increase negative emotional experiences and increase rates of anxiety in addition to a variety of other possible negative outcomes.



While in the new Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 (DSM-5), Internet Gaming Disorder has not been made an actual diagnosis yet, it is under investigation and will likely be considered a disorder by the next version. This is not to suggest that technology disorders don't exist. If you are concerned about your child, keep your eyes open for any significant changes in behaviour. Is technology usage interfering in your child's normal everyday activities such as getting ready for school or coming to family dinners? Does your child have a hard time turning off their phone/computer

when going to bed? Do they sneak online or lie about the extent of their use? If cutting back on their technology time causes your child to become excessively angry, irritated, violent or perhaps even lose interest in things that used to excite them, it's time to look into how much time they really are spending in front of a screen.

Often children mimic what their parents are doing. It is important that you be mindful and aware of your own technology usage, as it will definitely have an impact on your children's perception of 'normal' usage. If your child often sees you distracted by your smart phone while driving or at the mall, or doing work on your laptop, or playing on your iPad during dinner, they will be strongly influenced by the amount of time you spend on your own technology.

If you believe that your child may have a real problem with internet /gaming, cold turkey is not always the best approach. Kids, like adults can suffer real withdrawal symptoms including nervousness, anger and irritability. Instead parents can work with their children to establish clear boundaries for limited technology usage. Perhaps allow a set time per night after homework, with extra time on the weekend. Stick to your rules and remember that you're not simply trying to control him or her – you are working to free them of a potential psychological dependence. If things feel out of hand, seek out professional help. Electronic addictions are serious conditions. Clinical Psychologists are trained to help with these and many other types of addictions and mental health conditions.

Lastly, picking up a hobby or an interest that doesn't involve electronics is a great idea. Get yourself and your child involved with teams, clubs, sports, music, dancing, singing, etc. Find some new activities, as long as they do not involve electronics, and get involved in their life. Being mindful in your life is a great way to avoid the mindless surfing and game playing that often occurs today in our society. Wikipedia defines mindfulness as bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis, or involves paying attention

in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally. Using mindfulness strategies can be of great assistance in the fight against over-usage of technology.

In order to find a Psychologist in your area, please visit Cpo.On.Ca and press the 'member search' to find a local Clinical Psychologist. Psychologists are covered by your private health insurance and you may call yourself to book an appointment.