

“Why Can’t You Put Down that Phone?”

Discussion Booklet for Parents

<https://youtu.be/Thkl8-q2pYc>



<https://www.cathmed.org/media/> - public service videos

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WELCOME

Welcome to the CMA University Video Vignette Group Discussion—“Why Can’t You Put Down that Phone?” Over the course of your discussions you will view a brief video (approximately 5½ minutes), which will highlight some important principles about screen media use. After the video presentation, you will engage in a group discussion. You will have the opportunity to talk about how screen time influences your daily life. You’ll hear about some ideas that have benefitted many other young adults. Some groups might want to schedule additional discussion sessions to share their experiences and ideas. Enjoy!

Section 1

Video Review Questions

1. Did you hear anything that surprised you in the video?
 2. What does Marshall McLuhan mean when he says: “It’s the medium more than the content that is the message”?
 3. Why is *unpredictability* so powerful in stimulating desire and craving?
 4. How does *operant conditioning* or *cueing* make you want to check your cell phone?
 5. Persons who excessively engage in online gaming, for example, *World of Warcraft* or *Minecraft*, can have trouble stopping. Describe why this happens.
 6. What is your response to hearing that: Steve Jobs, founder of the iPhone, never permitted his kids to use an iPhone; and that Evan Williams, founder of Blogger, Twitter and Medium, refused to give his two young sons an iPad and instead bought them hundreds of books?*
- (*<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/11/fashion/steve-jobs-apple-was-a-low-tech-parent.html>)

Group Discussion Questions

The following questions are intended to help you reflect on your child's use of screen media.

1. In what ways do social media platforms/texting benefit you, your children, family and friends?
2. How much does your child's social interactions take place on screen media?
3. How much screen time does your child have per weekday and per weekend?
4. Does your child talk mostly about online gaming, social media or texting friends?
5. What family activities have been interfered with by your child's use of electronic devices?
6. Does your child multi-task when using his or her screens? What does your child choose to do when multi-tasking?
7. Is using an electronic device the first thing he or she asks to do when home from school/on weekends?
8. How much daily physical exercise is your child getting?
9. Does your child take his or her cell phone/tablet to bed? How has this affected the amount of sleep your child gets at night?
10. How does electronic media affect your child's mood?
11. In what situations are you tempted to give your child an electronic device as a distraction?
12. What guidelines have you established for your child's use of electronic media?
13. Have you had discussions with your child about appropriate use of cell phones, tablets, and computers? If so, what was fruitful about the conversations and what was challenging about the conversations?
14. What concerns do you have about limiting your child's use of electronic devices?
15. Has your child ever experienced FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out)? In what situations?
16. Are you concerned about taking away a screen activity that will make your child "not fit in" with his or her peers?
17. What skills or talents could your child develop if he or she were spending an hour less using electronic devices each day?

Section 2

Tips and Suggestions

It is difficult to know how much screen media is healthy and safe. Medical professionals offer some of the following guidelines that can be adapted for the needs of each of your children:

- **Children younger than 1 1/2 to 2 years:** Avoid media use (except for video chatting with family and loved ones).
- **Preschool children:** No more than one hour per day with parental screening.
- **Grade-schoolers and teens:** Don't let media displace other important activities. Aim for one hour of daily exercise, media-free meals, "unplugged" down-time and a full night's sleep.
- **Be your children's media mentor:** View media with your child (enjoy playing, sharing and teaching), to know what your child is viewing and guide appropriately. Also, model healthy screen-use habits yourself.

The good news is that the problematic effects of screen overuse can be addressed. There is much we can do to restore the balance that existed before the age of cell phones, tablets, emails, social networking and on-demand viewing.

We know the tricks that advertisers use to tempt us—a mouthwatering sundae or a shiny red car. Electronic design engineers also know how to get our attention. The color red in notifications on our cell phones or tablets triggers a desire to check what it is all about. Auto-play in videos can get us hooked to watching much longer than we intended. More and more cell phone and tablet functions are designed to get us to spend more time using these devices.

What would a healthy screen time plan look like for you, your family and in your interactions with your friends?

Here are a few suggestions:

Say no to notifications. A notification is intended to let you know something important needs attention. Most phone and tablet notifications are machine-automated and do not involve people. They are intended to get you to engage with an app you might not have otherwise thought about. Set notifications for things that are important to you. For example, you might want notifications when you receive a message from your child, spouse or supervisor.

- To do so, on an iPhone go to Settings Notifications Turn off everything except your message apps or other important tools.

Put your phone on “do not disturb” mode and allow only calls and messages from “favorites” to whom you have a responsibility. You might be surprised how much time interruptions from messages take away from what is important to you.

Remove social media and other apps from your phone. Tapping on an app, such as *Facebook* or *Twitter*, is easy to do—without much thinking. Limit your access to these apps to your home computer. If you have the urge to check your social media more often, ask yourself why: are you bored, lonely, anxious, bothered, or concerned? See if this need could be addressed more effectively in a real-life interaction or activity.

Keep only the apps on your home screen that are necessary. For example, some important apps to keep on your home screen may be your contacts, text messaging, email, maps and calendar apps that you use daily for family, work and select friends. Move your other apps to your second and third screens; what you do not see right away when you pick up your phone or tablet will be less tempting to access.

No screen zones. Use good screen etiquette. No screens at meal time will help facilitate face-to-face conversations and family bonding. Developing speech and language skills is strongly linked to developing human bonding, empathy, social responsibility, as well as to thinking, reading and writing ability. These essential human skills, and most especially you, cannot be replaced by technology. Also keep cell phones, tablets, and laptops out of the bedroom at night. This will promote more minutes of sleep and better quality sleep. Of course, no one should read or send messages while driving.

Use an old fashioned alarm clock. Not using the phone or tablet as an alarm clock will prevent you and your children from being tempted to engage in the many other functions the phone or tablet offers at a time and place designated for rest and sleep.

Help your child modify his or her screen habits. The goal of limiting screen time is not simply to be rid of the problematic effects but to optimize human development and maturation. Healthy well balanced child development takes place primarily through your face-to-face interactions. Again, your important role as a parent cannot be replaced by technology.

Since some screen time is all but inevitable in our world today, it is far easier to help children develop good habits in the first place than to correct existing bad habits.

Developing Positive Screen Habits

Encourage children to connect what they see in the screen world to their experience of the real world.

- For example, if an app asks a child to sort wooden blocks by color, ask the child to sort real wooden blocks by color or to sort his or her clothes by color.

- Encourage real world interpersonal interactive activities: board games, sports, hiking, outdoor/indoor work projects, and turn-taking conversations.
- Invite children to explain what they think is happening in a game or in an app they are using. Have them point to and identify the characters and their thoughts about the characters' behaviors. Have them comment on what behaviors might be modified and why.

The process of human growth and development also involves learning appropriate decision making skills and social etiquette. Teaching children the virtues of moderation, kindness, generosity and empathy, for example, will go a long way in helping them become successful adults.

What Drives Your Child's Use of Screens?

Help your child unpack what your child sees as the benefits of screen usage to understand the underlying need.

- For example, if a teenager checks her *Instagram* or *Snapchat* account many times a day, she likely wants to feel connected to her friends.
- Offer assistance in addressing this need to mutually explore other means of feeling connected and in which she feels validated in the absence of those "likes."

Remember, what works for one person may not work for another. Other examples to possibly consider:

- A child who is bored and turns to screen usage might benefit from joining a sports team or drama club.
- The vulnerability a bullied gamer experiences might be met, in part, by martial arts classes, in addition to speaking with his parents.

Once the underlying motivation for screen use is better understood, a new routine that satisfies this underlying motive can be sought.

Your efforts to better understand your child's motivations will more effectively address the underlying psychological need.

Modifying Your Child's Screen Habits

It is important to identify your concerns about your child's screen use. Then set goals to address these concerns. Setting clear goals helps keep everyone in your family focused on what is important. Without clear, relevant goals results are often disappointing.

Consult your experience. Ask your child's teacher, sitter, or grandparent as to what difficulties they observe in your child's screen usage. Is your child uncooperative, not interested in schoolwork or reluctant to participate in family activities? Focus on two or three behaviors that are most concerning and state your goal(s).

Consider using the acronym **SMART goal** which refers to a:

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Trackable goal for which you develop an action plan to address.

Let's say your child does not want to go to bed because he or she wants to finish an online game/social media post and often is sleepy and does not feel rested during the day. A **SMART goal** would be to work on getting better quality sleep for the next week.

Specific-Get more hours of sleep for your child

Measurable-Note the time bedroom lights are turned off and the time your child got up

Attainable-Yes, your child can get more sleep when not using cell phone, tablet, and laptop in bed

Relevant-Not bringing the cell phone, tablet, and laptop into the bedroom improves quality of sleep

Trackable-Track how many days sleep quality is improved

Next assess the cost and benefit of this **SMART goal** action plan for your child. Decide whether you want to continue with this action plan, modify it, or completely change it and why. Write this information down in your journal.

For example, ask your child his or her experience of sleep without taking his or her cell phone/tablet/laptop to bed. Share your experience with your child in his or her having done so. Depending on the age of your child, invite him or her to draw a picture or write down the results of going to bed without any device around.

Develop **SMART goal** action plans for your other areas of concern.

To provide another example of a **SMART goal** action plan, a parent notices that the child complains or cries when the use of an electronic device is limited. A **SMART goal** may be to reduce the frequency of this behavior by replacing device time with one-on-one time to build a toy model plane, to make jewelry, or to play with Legos, for example.

Help Replace Screen Time with Positive Family Activities

Consider scheduling a range of activities for the whole family, as well as one-on-one time with each child that communicate "I want to be with you; you are important to me; and we can have fun together." Be creative and engage your personal interests for non-screen time fun. For example:

- Take a family walk
- Have a picnic
- Ride bikes together
- Play Frisbee
- Play catch, jump rope
- Cook a meal together
- Plant a garden
- Go out for an ice cream treat

- For very young children
 - Teach them nursery rhymes
 - Play *Simon says*, *Peek-a-boo* or *London bridges falling down*

You can also ask your grand/parents what they did before the Internet for some screen-free fun.

Parents need to be good models for their children. The bonus is that your child's executive functioning, that is the work of his or her part of the brain responsible for reflection, integration of thoughts and planning will be enhanced. Your child's *pleasure center* will also be less stimulated and this will contribute to your child's greater sense of calm.

Utilize Apps to Help Increase Screen-free Time

Many apps are available to help you be more mindful of your family members' use of screens and to allow for more screen-free time. One example is *Onward*, an app that helps block websites and apps and tracks phone or tablet usage.

There are also apps that allow you to designate screen-free time for the whole family. Some examples include:

- *Moment Family*
- *Breakfree*
- *DinnerTime Plus*

Consider Internet firewalls and filtering systems for your cell phone, tablet, and computer as appropriate for your family. There are many on the market. Check out what system is most appropriate for you and your family. Some suggestions include:

- *Circle Go*
- *Qustodio*
- *Covenant Eyes*
- *Mobicip*
- *OurPact*

App blocking devices to consider:

- *Freedom* for Apple and Windows products
- *Offtime* for Android products

GizmoPal is a GPS tracking watch for kids that may be useful for your family.

Challenge yourself to reduce screen time.

Initially, try to reduce your screen time by one hour per week.

You could also challenge your family to a no-screen day. Having your family give up screens for a day is not intended to be a punishment. It is an opportunity for your family to reflect on the

ways in which screen activity separated you and ways in which you decide you want to enrich your time together.

- Get your family on board.
- Choose a day that is realistic to be screen-free.
- Take some time to reflect on your screen-free day as a family.
 - What did you notice?
 - How did your no-screen day compare with a day when using screens?
 - What do you notice when you were interacting face-to-face with others for a day?
 - What was your family able to do because you were not engaged with your individual screens?

Based upon your experience with a no-screen day, consider finding an entire weekend to go screen-free.

Need help?

For some persons, online gaming or other Internet activities become an irresistible obsession. Help is available. Treatment options range from limited outpatient therapy to intensive residential inpatient programs. Check online for treatment options that fit you and your family's needs.

Resources

Below are suggested resources. No endorsement of all material contained therein is intended.

Websites/Blogs/Podcasts

Alliance for Childhood’s Critical Look at Computers in Childhood
(www.allianceforchildhood.org/fools_gold)

Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org)

Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood — Every May, schools across the country participate in “National Screen-Free Week” (www.screenfree.org)

Internet Live Stats (www.internetlivestats.com)

Social Media Use 2018 (www.pewinternet.org)

Screenagers Growing Up in the Digital Age (www.screenagersmovie.com)

TED Talks on Screen Use:

- “Why Screens Make Us Less Happy,” Adam Alter
(www.ted.com/talks/adam_alter_why_our_screens_make_us_less_happy)
- “What You Are Missing While Being a Digital Zombie,” Patrik Wincent (youtu.be/TAIxb42FjwE)
- “Why We Should Rethink Our Relationship with the Smartphone,” Lior Frenkel
(youtu.be/Pgo65s1R6TM)
- “How Social Media Makes Us Unsocial,” Allison Graham (youtu.be/d5GecYjy9-Q)

The Art of Manliness podcasts (www.artofmanliness.com/podcast)

Ascension Press (ascensionpress.com)

Steubenville Mid-America Conference presents Paul J. Kim on elevating social media
(steubystl365.com/paul-kim-elebate-social-media/)

Books

How to Break Up with Your Phone, Catherine Price (2018).

Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked, Adam Alter (2018).

Reset Your Child’s Brain: A 4-Week Plan to End Meltdowns, Raise Grades and Boost Social Skills by Reversing the Effects of Electronic Screen Time, Victoria Dunckley (2015).

iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood, Jean M. Twenge, PhD (2017).

The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World, Adam Gassaley and Larry O. Rosen (2016).

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