

**December 2021**



# Digital Life Newsletter For Parents

**Dear Parents and Guardians,**

This month's newsletter deals with mindful technology use. I hope you find it helpful.

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1. No screens (phones, tablets, laptops, TV, etc. in bedrooms where children or teens sleep. When they go to bed the device should be elsewhere. The mere presence of a phone nearby will increase a stress hormone (cortisol). We will often check our phones to reduce our stress hormone level and this can become repetitive and compulsive.
2. Do not use your Smartphone as an alarm clock.
3. Turn off as many notifications as possible. Notifications elevate the urge to use the phone and activate anticipatory dopamine in the mesolimbic brain reward pathways.
4. Never use any screen 1 hour before bed. Viewing screens changes circadian rhythms and sleep patterns and increases the risk of inadequate sleep which many teens already suffer from. There is some evidence that the blue screen light changes some brain functions.

5. Consider installing software or apps that monitor how much screen or smartphone time your child or teen consumes. This takes you out of the equation and your child will learn to budget how much time they have and help develop more mindful use of his or her technology. It also decreases the potential for arguments and conflicts between the parent and the child.
6. The Internet operates on a variable ratio reinforcement schedule and produces intermittent and unpredictable “hits” or “rewards” in the form of desired information, messages, or content. You never know what you’re going to get, when you are going to get it, and how good it is going to be. Intermittent and anticipated rewards (via notifications) produce elevations of the neurochemical Dopamine. When you get a notification, you get a little buzz, ding, or a bell that tells you there’s a reward waiting. The elevation of dopamine from anticipated reward is twice as high as the actual reward itself. The intermittent reinforcements from our Internet-based technologies are potentially habit-forming and addictive.
7. Consider *graying-out* (setting the screen to Black & White) the phone. This potentially makes the phone less appealing and stimulating.
8. Create a REAL-TIME 100 list of things that you or your child can do that don’t involve a screen. This can be a creative and fun task and reignite lost pleasures from real-time living skills.
9. Learn to tolerate boredom. Boredom is the gateway to creativity and social/interpersonal motivation. If we are always seeking instant distraction we never develop other internal self-soothing skills and the desire to extend beyond ourselves.
10. Never have the phone easily accessible while driving. Teens and adolescents (as well as adults) are very susceptible to distraction and are 6-7 times more likely to have an accident when using a smartphone while driving. The teen brain is less well developed in the frontal region of the brain where reasoning and judgment reside and are more prone to poor decision making than adults, but both are susceptible to distracted driving.

11. Never have the phone out during meals.
  
12. The best way to help your child achieve mindful and sustainable technology use is to model the same behavior yourself. Your child or teen is watching you and how you manage your tech use. They will be far more likely to adopt healthy technology use if they see you doing the same.

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