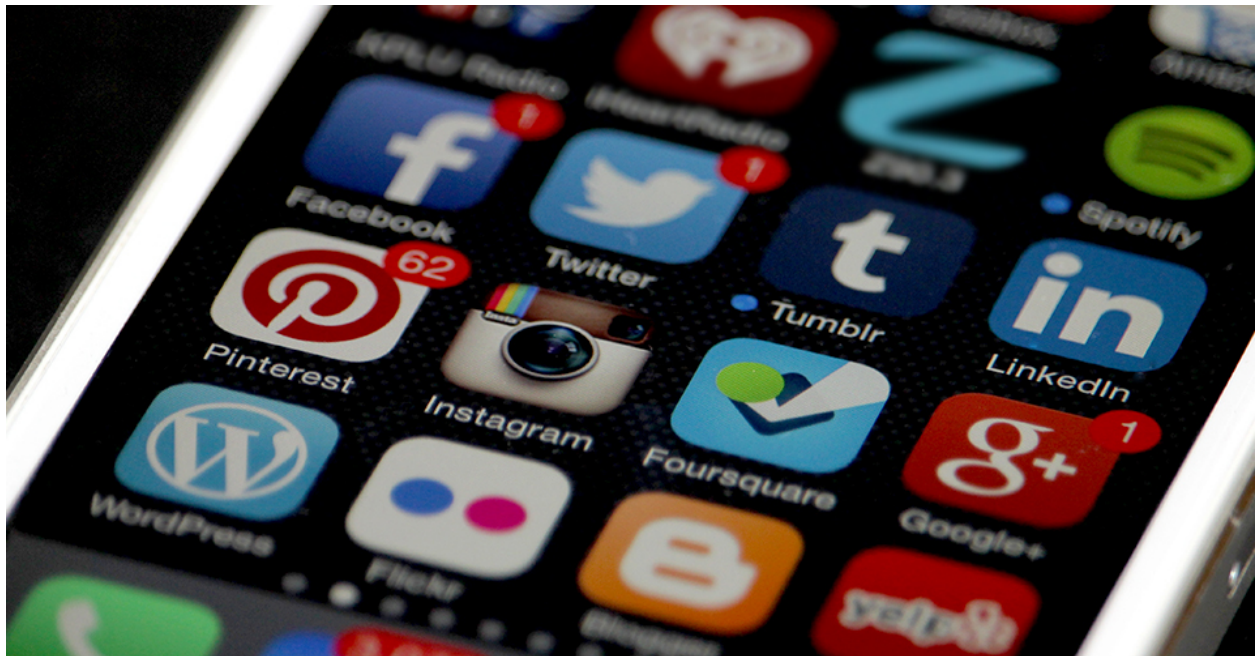


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How to Break Your Smartphone Addiction

by Sean Jackson Last Updated: May 9th, 2017



If you're a millennial like me or an avid smartphone user of any age, I'm sure you'd agree you would benefit from learning how to break your smartphone addiction.

Smartphones have become our digital appendages, where we can tweet, text, snap a picture, shop, watch videos and more within a matter of seconds.

While this accessibility can be convenient, it can also be overwhelming and even detrimental in the event of cell phone addiction.

As a result, this article is an explanation of what cell phone addiction entails and how to break your cell phone addiction (if you can admit you have one).

How to Break Your Smartphone Addiction - In This Guide

- What is Cell Phone Addiction?
- What Are the Symptoms of Cell Phone Addiction?

- 6 Ways to Stop Phone Addiction
- Apps to Help Curb your Addiction
- Make Adjustments Slowly
- How to Break Your Smartphone Addiction: Recap

What is Cell Phone Addiction?

About 77 percent of Americans now own smartphones, according to Pew Research Center. Cell phone addiction is a compulsive behavioral addiction where you seek uses of your mobile device for emotional outlets and instant gratification. To put it another way, you might feel guilty, depressed, bored, or stressed, so you use your mobile phone to zone out.

While temporary distractions can be useful in clearing your mind, they can also usher in mobile phone dependency. Mobile phone dependency can distract you from important tasks such as work and take time away from the people you love the most. Cell phone addiction can happen to young adults from elementary school to high school and from college students to working class adults.

According to adolescent psychiatrist and technology addiction expert Dr. Graham, technological addiction has gotten worse in recent years. Dr. Graham says it's because of the increasing number of smart mobile devices that can connect to the Internet, according to the Telegraph.

What Are the Symptoms of Cell Phone Addiction?

Psychotherapist and author Nancy Colier wrote that the average person checks their phone 150 times a day, according to the Nancy Colier blog. Sounds crazy, right? Technology addiction is a behavioral addiction that can take varied forms of behaviors. Below is a look at some common ones you might encounter:

- You have a compulsion to check your phone even in important situations like work meetings, at the dinner table with family, or even on dates
- You become distracted and are less likely to engage in normal communication with work colleagues and friends
- You participate in dangerous behaviors for instant gratification: you text and drive, make phone calls or check your mobile phone when driving

Read More: Unfortunately, smartphone addiction may factor into a larger problem: Internet addiction. Although both conditions have similarities, there are striking differences. Read more on overcoming Internet addiction [here](#).

Touching on the last point further, in a survey conducted by Common Sense Media, 56 percent of parents admitted that they check their phone while driving, make calls while driving, or text and drive. Even worse, 51 percent of young adults witnessed their parents engaging in this behavior.

According to Pew Research Center in 2015, 24 percent of teenagers are constantly on their cell phones, which has probably increased since then. As we become further addicted to cell phone use, it can take its toll on our health as well. Addiction Tips states that you can experience:

- Added stress due to the compulsive nature of checking your phone
- You can experience insomnia because your body's melatonin mistakes the light from your phone as sunlight, making it more difficult for you to sleep
- You can also experience irritability, nervousness, and anxiety

These situations become dangerous because they reduce your mind's effectiveness to think critically due to lack of sleep. Additionally, your emotions can become frayed and your initial distraction becomes an addiction you cannot control. This can seriously affect your life, especially if you're a college student or entry-level worker trying to keep up.

Related: [The Dangers of Texting & Driving](#)

Research from Baylor University

According to Dr. Roberts from Baylor University, there are six signs to consider to determine whether you are addicted to your phone. You can check out the Huffington Post cell phone addiction symptom list to compare.

1. Salience

Is your cell phone your best friend? If it's the last thing you do before you go to bed and the first thing you do when you wake up, this could be a sign of addiction.

2. Euphoria

If you would rather be on your smartphone playing Candy Crush and looking through Facebook or Twitter than interacting with those around you, you may have a smartphone addiction.

3. Tolerance

If you feel like you are using your phone more and more, you may be developing tolerance, a sign of addiction.

4. Withdrawal symptoms

If you have a near panic attack every time your phone isn't in sight, you may be experiencing withdrawal symptoms from an addiction. You may also have a panic disorder. Check with your doctor or therapist to see how to go about treating a panic disorder if you think you may have one.

5. Conflict

If your smartphone is getting in the middle of your relationships and affecting your life, you may have a problem.

6. Relapse

If you've ever tried to stay off your phone for a day or two and were not successful, you may need to get some help.

6 Ways to Stop Phone Addiction

CNN Digital says that technology addictions can happen to anyone. In relation, anyone can stop their cell phone addiction, but it requires you to make small adjustments to your behaviors and bad habits. As these patterns set in, your focus and need to use your smartphone compulsively reduces until you reach the point you achieve a healthy balance. Here are some tips to assist you in learning how to break your cell phone addiction.

1. Inform Others of Your Struggle

About 50 percent of teenagers feel as though they're addicted to their cell phones, according to CNN Digital. Once you admit to yourself that you have a technology addiction, it's important to share your struggles and bad habits with others. They can form a supportive environment where they supply advice for reducing your usage, refer you to a therapist who can teach you coping mechanisms, and hold you accountable for your actions.

2. Disengage

Many social media apps like Facebook or Twitter provide notifications seemingly for every time someone breathes. This distraction is what can cause cell phone addiction initially. For example, you may have a Facebook addiction.

If you have a Facebook addiction, you may get excited as dopamine (one of your brain's reward chemicals) flows to your brain when you receive a like, share or comment on your Facebook status, according to Psych Alive. As a result, you may begin continuously checking your social media apps for that quick dopamine fix because you don't know when you're going to get it.

If you notice this happening, try to delete your social apps and take a social media break. Taking a step back from your Facebook status or other social media can clear your mind and help you develop actionable steps to tackle your addiction.

3. Ditch the Smartphone

If you struggle to stay off your smartphone even when you realize there's a problem, it might be time to part with it. You can buy a standard cell phone or a pre-paid phone; this way you still have access to a phone line in case of an emergency. Another alternative is to contact your cell phone provider and ask for them to turn off your internet access.

You can always sell your smartphone with some of these services if you just need the phone out of your life.

4. Change How You Interact With Others

It's easy to pull out the smartphone to send a text message to others, but often, this contributes to you being on the phone too much. Instead of sending text messages back and forth, make a phone call and invite your friends and family to meet for some face-to-face interaction. A cup of coffee, dinner or even a walk in the park is a great way to change up the routine and most importantly, build the habit of putting down the phone.

5. Alter Your Hobbies

Think of some of the behaviors you've engaged in that made you increase your reliance on your cell phone; then change them. To demonstrate, say you enjoyed online gaming, so the absorption of the game(s) increased your time online drastically to the point you were playing the game for hours at a time without any breaks.

Instead of gaming like Candy Crush online, find some friends and play board games for some face-to-face interaction. If you've been texting too much at the dinner table, put your phone away during dinner. If you've been texting too much in general, try making a phone call instead to practice your interaction skills. These small steps will allow you to stimulate your mind and socialize.

6. Find New Activities

Maybe the problem wasn't you were too absorbed in a hobby, you didn't have a hobby to begin with, resulting in your boredom being the catalyst for the addiction. If this is the case, then it's important to find hobbies to occupy your time. Chances are they are easy to find. Your community has many projects you can participate in from volunteering to serving on councils. You can try your hands at a craft, play in an adult softball league, read, workout at home, or even train for a 5k.

The goal is to find something that interests you and takes you a bit out of your comfort zone. In addition to this becoming a rewarding experience, it also alters your priorities away from compulsive smartphone use.

Apps to Help Curb your Addiction

I know it sounds counterproductive, but Android, iOS, and Windows all have apps to help you curb your smartphone addiction. For example, the Windows, iOS and Android app Forest will reward you for not touching your phone. Here's a list of Windows, iOS, and Android apps to help you stop checking your phone so often.

- Forest (iOS, Android, windows)
- UnPlug (iOS)
- Freedom (Windows, iOS, Android)
- Checky (Android, iOS)
- Productivity Challenge Timer (Android)

Make Adjustments Slowly

Don't try to do too much at once or try to quit your phone cold turkey. Quitting cold turkey can create anxiety, which could backfire, forcing you back to excessive smartphone usage. Instead, make small adjustments to your behavior.

To illustrate, set a timer for 30 minutes for your cell phone use. Once that time expires, leave your phone and engage in a constructive activity such as bike riding, meeting a friend for coffee, or reading.

You can also try sleeping with your cell phone in a different room, as the Huffington Post suggests. You may even want to get a separate alarm clock if you normally use your phone as an alarm clock. Setting small, realistic goals, can give you the feeling of control back while preventing the transition from being too stress inducing.

How to Break Your Smartphone Addiction: Recap

These tips can help you prevent or break your smartphone usage addiction. If you feel that your child may be addicted to their phone, you can check out our cell phone safety ultimate guide for parents.

Also, if you plan on browsing available cell phone plans, please be sure to inspect any available parental controls or tools that wireless providers may have that would help you and your children overcome cell phone addiction.

Screenagers Notes

1. Dopamine is released with the stimulus (or seeking of) NEW activities or information. When you multitask, you are less effective but you FEEL like you are getting more done, because of the dopamine firing off with all the shifts in focus. This dopamine is an artifact of hunter/survivor living, our brain reflexively searching always for threats and food, etc. – but it's driving us to a less healthy rhythm in our media-steeped lives.
2. Addiction pathways in media addiction and drug addiction are the same.
3. In studies, rats that were given screen stimulus grew LESS neural connections than those without screens. Suggesting screen stimulus inhibits brain development. The most alarming discovery of the study was that the neural structure was permanent – when the screens were taken away, the rats didn't grow more neural connections. The lack of brain development was a dead end, set by that early exposure to screens. We don't know if this carries over to human brains, but it doesn't bode well.
4. When kids have a say in the contract that's created around their cell phone usage, they respond better; it's best for screen usage to be handled as a dialogue, the reason for limitations explained and discussed, so that there's mutual understanding on both sides for the necessity of the limits. Parents and kids should realize that they're on the same side: protecting our malleable brains (and self-directed inner state of mind) from being re-shaped by a strong relationship with screens.
5. Parents shouldn't be afraid to suffer through a tantrum or upset when setting a limit around less screen time – keeping the rule in place will allow the teenager to respect the line and change, ultimately. As a teenager, it's important to accept that there may be some discomfort while 'detaching' from the pacifying effect of a coveted, familiar screen device; learning to self-soothe in real time without a device is such an important skill, teens should try seeing the discomfort of leaving devices behind as a rite of

passage to growing emotionally stronger. It's part of growing a more complex, nuanced brain that's capable of greater personal and social finesse.

Teens and adults who know they rely on devices as part of the way they self-soothe or regulate their feelings might ask themselves: What could I do in the real world, in real time (right now), that would bring about the feeling I'm seeking from using the device? What can I say, do or create that would generate the 'inner stasis' I'm seeking? Should I:

- connect with someone
- bond / share something
- communicate how I'm feeling or what I'm wanting right now to someone
- just take a minute to think, study the clouds, or be in nature
- play a game with a friend or family member
- make art or some other project
- get physical, run/hit the gym, or play a sport with someone
- journal or do something to acknowledge where I'm at/connect to myself
- nap/rest/restore/meditate/take a walk
- handle something that's bothering me instead of trying to escape it
- make a meal for myself or to share
- do homework / volunteer to help a family member with what they're doing
- get something done that's been on my mind
- doodle or do a crossword puzzle or mind-teaser on paper
- ask myself what I need, accept it, and see what I can do about getting it
- spend time with my pet
- seek out a sibling
- identify something I haven't done in a long time – or have never done before – and do it!

The list is endless, but the key is to get back 'in the field' of life and relate, connect, create, do and be with whatever you're feeling, honoring it. Give yourself and others your attention, actions and presence. "Make hay" however you see fit, in three-dimensional space and time, riding the wave of life.

6. There was an example of a boy who became so addicted to video games, that playing them took over his life, and he ceased to do his school work or other life activities, staying up late at night to finish playing games, and ultimately failing out of his college classes. To break the addiction, he had to spend a period of time in a recovery program, re-learning to relate to his friends and family, invest in simple things like playing the piano, and live life in the moment. Though it might seem easy for students to dismiss this example as extreme/not related to their own level of device addiction, the underlying dynamic of becoming acclimated to a game/device as the means of regulating your experience, your daily status quo, or your emotions is a sneaky one, and everyone -- teenager or adult alike -- is at risk for this dependency to arise within them. Even if the degree of addiction is less, the impact of screen dependence is still costly, and taking a close look at where it exists for you personally is key.
7. Some parents have created a rule where devices are checked at the door; a basket at the entryway where all entering teenagers have to leave their phones before engaging in a play date at their house. These rules created more connected, less distracted kids in their homes. Similarly, a rule has been adopted by some teens or adults when going to dinner, wherein everyone's phone must go in the middle of the table, not to be touched; the first person who picks up their phone pays the restaurant bill for the whole group.
8. Adults should prepare kids, and teenagers should prepare themselves, for the time when something weird will pop up on an internet search – know that when it happens it's best close out the window and find a trusted adult.
9. Talk Tech Tuesdays – people can sign up at Screenagersmovie.com – or there are now Online Citizenship approaches where respect online is defined, discussed, and taught to be equally important on the internet as anywhere.
10. Regarding girls taking pictures of themselves: the girls in the film discussed how this habit can lead to a loss of a sense of their private/personal self, and/or a total concentration on self and concern with how they are

accepted by others or not. Girls discussed this picture-posting habit as a consuming distraction that stopped them from being able to see what was going on around them. Leaving this habit behind can allow teenagers to re-invest in what's real, rather than a projected fantasy, and be grounded in what's happening in the moment.

11. As for boys becoming distracted by device use, some boys in the film who played video games while class was in session insisted, as their explanation, that the video games were 'just closer than the teacher' or that they were 'boy stuff' and 'not a problem' – when the evidence speaks to the contrary – video game usage has been shown to be linked to increased aggression, decreased empathy, greater likelihood to act out or bully or cheat or do things which negatively impact others. Limiting game play to a reasonable amount of time can do teenagers a favor on multiple levels – socially, emotionally, in terms of self-regulation and self-control, in ways that can't necessarily be foreseen in the moment. Parents and kids who make a video game time limit and stick to it arguably protect their kids' futures.
12. When teens learn boundaries for themselves early on, they are then able to set good boundaries for themselves as adults. Take the time to learn how to disconnect from phones and devices, become conscious of use and over-use, and make healthy choices to remain connected to others in the moment – these are indispensable skills that will strengthen a person at any age and pay lifelong dividends.
13. Ideas for removing tech influences in the social atmosphere of the home:
 - a. Have a dedicated place for phones and devices, where they are deposited upon entering the home.
 - b. Create a screen time contract limiting usage, based on mutually understood goals.
 - c. Keep computers, tablets and TVs, when possible, in a place where they aren't in the 'social area' of the home, so that those who are engaged with a screen will not be projecting device-focus to those who are relating to each other.

- d. Make a conscious decision to keep devices out of bedrooms when it's time for sleep.
- e. Create a family list of 'Alternative Activities' with go-to suggestions to opt for, rather than screen time – brainstorm the list together and post it on the fridge or someplace where the whole family can see it.
- f. Set a weekly meeting where family members regularly discuss device usage and any current challenges, concerns, discoveries or victories.
- g. Make a 'treat jar' wherein each week that a family member keeps their screen agreement, a coin is tossed in – when the jar is full, the family does a weekend or day trip, special dinner, or something to celebrate their growth and accountability.
- h. Build in 'Special time' – dedicated, quality time spent being together as a family. Let the kids take turns choosing what the activity will be. Lean in to family and friend connection as the antidote to screen time.
- i. Set allotted times when email will be checked, for instance in the morning and night, rather than letting it spread out constantly over the day. Each family member should model boundaries around device usage. Build the habit of positioning the time when family is together as screen-free time.
- j. Create occasional 'Unplug' days where the whole family drops the devices for the day.
- k. Join after school boys and girls clubs, Just Keep Livin', and any other civic activities that keep you socially related, learning and engaged.
- l. Build awareness of the natural rewards in life – mastering a concept, making a friend, helping someone out, doing something that makes you proud of yourself, encouraging others to keep trying, persevering at something until you finish it, changing a habit that isn't working, empathizing with someone who is struggling, teaching someone else what you know, learning a new skill, taking a risk without judging how you perform, making someone laugh, supporting the adults who support you, spreading good feelings with a compliment, standing up for someone who needs it, meeting all your goals for the day, expressing yourself clearly and feeling understood, getting the endorphin rush of a good run, competing with integrity, feeling you're part of a team, coming up with a good idea, keeping a level head, finding a win-win or compromise, respecting yourself and others, learning to drive a car, getting the recognition of your family or peers,

setting a good example for others, losing weight or getting in shape, becoming faster or better at something, giving a clear and helpful answer in class, acing a test, watching someone you care about get what they want, enjoying the togetherness of pure family time...

These are all REWARDS that occur naturally in life. Pursue them! Rather than looking for 'electronic' / neural rewards that only exist in the two-dimensional world of a tablet/game, or dopamine rushes that 'simulate' a real reward because you are multi-tasking (but are not actually doing anything reward-worthy)—look for the real thing! Go after things that really make you and others feel good and rewarded – engage, give and receive, feel the experience, make things happen... and enjoy it!



Getty Images

Don't Text While Parenting — It Will Make You Cranky

Alice Park

TIME Health

For more, visit [TIME Health](#).

It's hard to avoid the lure of the smartphone — so many apps! — and if you're a parent with rambunctious kids, you may not want to. But a fascinating study of the dynamic between parents, kids and smartphones paints a sobering picture of what the devices are doing to the parent-child relationship.

Dr. Jenny Radesky, a fellow in developmental-and-behavioral pediatrics at Boston Medical Center, specializes in counseling parents about developmental and behavioral issues with their children. So she was naturally curious about how the ubiquity of smartphones, and their distracting allure, might affect the quality of time that parents and their children spent together. Previous studies showed that TVs, even if they are only on in the background, can inhibit children's creativity and siphon their concentrating and focusing powers.

To study the effect of smartphones, Radesky and her colleagues sent in undercover investigators to surreptitiously observe any adult-child grouping with more than one youngster as they ate at a fast-food restaurant. The observers recorded the behavior of both the adults and the children in 55 such groupings, as well as how frequently the adults used their smartphones.

The data provided an unvarnished look at how absorbed many parents were by their devices. One child reached over in an attempt to lift his mother's face while she looked down at a tablet, but to no avail. Another mother kicked her child under the table in response to the child's various attempts to get her attention while she looked at her phone. A father responded in curt and irritated tones to his children's escalating efforts to tear him away from his device.

"What stood out was that in a subset of caregivers using the device almost through the entire meal, how negative their interactions could become with the kids," she says. While the study did not code or quantify the reactions, Radesky says that there were "a lot of instances where there was very little interaction, harsh interaction or negative interaction" between the adults and the children. "That's simply unfair to the children," says Dr. Wendy Sue Swanson of Seattle Children's Hospital and author of the Seattle Mama Doc blog.

In light of the data, Radesky is working with the American Academy of Pediatrics to develop some guidelines for the smart smartphone use in front of the kids — just as the academy has advice for parents on TV viewing (none for toddlers younger than 2). She and her group also plan to expand the studies with videotapes of the interactions, to better understand how parents absorbed by their phones engage with and respond to their kids, as well as the kids' reactions to having their parents or caregivers having their attention diverted by the devices. Part of the broader work will also include a more detailed analysis of what parents are doing on their

phones, to determine if there are better and worse things to do while in the company of youngsters.

In the meantime, setting aside devices during specific times, such as meal, story and bed times, can help to minimize any potentially distracting effects that smartphones have on parent-child interactions. Using the phone, says Swanson, “is not recommended at the dinner table — a time that we think is valuable to fostering cohesion.”

Also, recognizing that responding to email or scanning Facebook while your kids are waiting or attempting to get your attention isn’t fair to them and could change the nature of your relationship with your kids if they don’t feel they are as important as the device. “These data are a wake-up call for we parents in that we really need to think about how these enticing devices not only distract us but potentially change who we are as parents,” says Swanson.

Establishing no-device rules at certain times of day or places in the home can also help. That not only can improve relations between young children and their parents, but also teach the children about how to properly engage with people during conversations or interactions as they grow older. “My concern is that if the device use becomes really excessive, and it replaces our day-to-day interactions, then kids won’t get much practice with having conversations, reading social cues and responding sensitively to something that the other person expresses,” she says. Kids learn by watching and participating, and if parents aren’t engaging with their children, then the young ones could start to lose their social role models. And who wants a generation of people who text each other while sitting at the same table?