

Smartphone and Social Media Use: Key Research

1. What We Know

A snapshot of screen time habits and trends:

- People check their phones 2,600+ times/day
- 50.4% of teens report 4+ hours of daily screen time (CDC, 2023)
- Teens with 4+ hours/day: 2x more likely to report anxiety; nearly 3x more likely to report depression
- 11% of teens show signs of problematic social media use (WHO, 2024)
- Screen time in kids (ages 9–10) is linked to more anxiety, impulsivity, and focus challenges
- Excessive screen use is tied to poor sleep and lower academic performance
- Nearly all kids (ages 3–18) have internet access
- Short-form content (TikTok, YouTube Shorts) is replacing traditional TV
- 30% of kids under 8 are using AI tools for learning

2. The Science of Why We Can't Stop Scrolling

Helps kids learn to pause, reset, and reconnect

- Smartphones offer instant connection and quick hits of dopamine—which feel good, but fade fast
- Our brains crave more, keeping us reaching for the next scroll or tap
- After a digital distraction, it takes 23–25 minutes to fully refocus
- Just having a phone nearby can reduce real connection and empathy
- Blue light from screens disrupts melatonin, making it harder to fall and stay asleep

3. A Healthier Way to Use Tech

It's not about quitting screens—it's about using them well:

- Practice “digital nutrition”—mindful, intentional use
- Understand internal triggers: *Why am I picking up my phone?*

- Model the habits you want your kids to build—they're watching

➤ *Kids don't just need limits. They need adults who show them what balance looks like. When their deeper needs are met—autonomy, competence, and connection—they are more likely to thrive both offline and online.*

4. What Kids Are Seeing (and Feeling) Online

Social media use, pressure, and risks:

- Nearly 50% of teens say they use the internet 'almost constantly' (Pew, 2023)
- 42% of daily smartphone use comes from social media apps
- 1 in 5 students experience cyberbullying—linked to anxiety and school avoidance
- 23% of teens were bullied online in the past month (up from 16% in 2016)
- 73% of teens have seen pornography by age 17 (54% by age 13)
- Tech overuse rewires the brain, reduces emotional regulation, and increases pressure to appear 'perfect'

5. Helpful Apps & Tools

Bark – Alerts for unsafe messages and content

Qustodio – Screen time and content filters

OurPact – App blocking and screen time schedules

Gabb Wireless – Kid-safe phones with no internet access

LetGrow.org – Builds real-world independence and confidence

ProtectYoungEyes.com – Tech safety tips for families

CommonSenseMedia.org – Age-based reviews of apps, games, and shows

Wait Until 8th – A pledge to delay smartphones until 8th grade



our passion is to build stronger community through healthy relationships

6. Books & Experts Worth Exploring

- Jonathan Haidt – The Anxious Generation: Youth mental health and smartphones
- Dr. Lisa Damour – The Emotional Lives of Teenagers: Parenting strategies for emotional growth
- Dr. Anna Lembke – Dopamine Nation: Tech addiction and the brain
- Jane McGonigal – SuperBetter: Building resilience and motivation
- Dr. Jill Walsh – Teens & Digital Identity: How social media shapes self-worth
- Dr. Henry Cloud & Dr. John Townsend: Boundaries: Teaching kids emotional self-control

Bonus: APA Tips for Healthy Tech Use (American Psychological Association)

- Create tech-free zones (like bedrooms and meals)
- Set screen time limits
- Avoid apps with likes or endless scroll
- Talk about how tech affects the brain (dopamine, melatonin, sleep)
- Use parental controls and filters
- Ask regularly about online experiences
- Model healthy habits—set limits for yourself, too

7. How to Support Your Child's Mental Health

- **Coping Skills** – Help kids identify stress and build tools to manage it
- **Open Communication** – Listen without judgment to build trust and reflection
- **Boundaries & Consequences** – Set limits with empathy to build accountability
- **Confidence & Growth** – Kids grow by facing challenges, not avoiding discomfort
- **Meaningful Struggles** – Encourage independence, effort, and learning through failure

5:1 Ratio:

In order for relationships to thrive and be healthy we need a ratio of 5 positive interactions to every 1 negative interaction. ~ Gottman Institute

8. Questions to Ask Your Kids About Technology

- What's your favorite way to use technology? How does it make you feel?
- Does keeping up online ever feel like work?
- What do you do when you're bored without a screen?
- Do you ever feel like you've been on a screen too long? How do you know?
- What makes you happiest with technology? What makes you feel stressed?
- How does comparing yourself to others online affect you?
- Do you ever feel like technology gets in the way of time with family or friends? How?
- What do you wish adults understood about how kids use technology?



"Research shows that teens with empathetic parents actually have lower levels of systemic inflammation – a biological marker of emotional stress – but we tend to breeze right past offering empathy and instead serve up reassurance."

~ Lisa Damour

