

Problematic smartphone use

According to the Ofcom report 'Children's Media Lives 2024', children are spending between 6-8 hours a day on social media, through their smartphones or other devices. This is an increase from 12 hours a week in 2014. Unlike the content that used to be watched directly on the TV, young people are often unsupervised, leaving them thinking that everything they are seeing is real and true to life.

There are many reasons that social media is so addictive and keeps our children on their phones:

- Social media provides instant feedback through likes and comments allowing them to feel social validation and approval.
- The latest trends are showcased on social media leaving young people with a fear of missing out. This increases the drive to check their feeds obsessively.
- Every notification or positive interaction triggers a release of dopamine, the feel good hormone.
- Young people are exposed to versions of others' lives on social media which seem faultless. This leads to comparisons and the desire to project a similarly perfect image of themselves.
- Social media provides a place to connect with others who they might not meet in real life. It also provides communities connected with hobbies.

Proposed smartphone boundaries

Implementing boundaries can be challenging once a child has become accustomed to unrestricted smartphone usage. However, once you have made a connection with your child (see image, right) around the reasons you must keep them safe on their smartphone, it is advisable to put boundaries in place. Here are some suggested boundaries:

Parent access:

- Shared passwords.
- Parent and child regularly review social media and messaging apps together.

Screen limits:

- Daily limits.
- Phone-free activities.

Phone-free areas:

- No devices in the bedroom or bathroom.
- Devices to be stored away in a central charging area 30 minutes before bed.

Conduct:

- Honesty about how the phone is used.
- Respect and kindness shown to everyone you are communicating with.

Top tips:

- Occupy your child during phone-free times, or support them to occupy themselves.
- This will be a challenge but you are doing it to protect your child.

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- Better sleep routines
- App focus: Snapchat

Talking to your children about their smartphone use

-  **Where and when?**
Take advantage of opportunities to connect while participating in daily tasks such as driving, shopping, or doing chores together.
-  **How to make a connection**
Relate your concerns to real life situations. Mention examples you have seen on the news or in TV shows.
-  **Start to ask questions**
When discussing real life examples, ask gently about the experiences of their friends. Avoid asking them directly about their own experience.
-  **Discuss boundaries**
Ask what things you should be doing, as their parent, to make sure they are kept safe on their phone. Give your suggestions too.
-  **Implement boundaries**
Agree on one or two boundaries and try for two weeks before adding others. This may include some non-negotiables.

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SPOTLIGHT ON SAFEGUARDING

4 WAYS TO HELP A TEENAGER IMPROVE THEIR SLEEP

Here are 4 practical strategies to help teenagers get better sleep



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The Significance of Sleep

For teenagers, sleep plays a crucial role due to the significant changes happening in their bodies and minds. Here are some key reasons highlighting the importance of sleep:

- **Physical growth and development:** Sleep triggers the release of growth hormones necessary for physical growth.
- **Brain development:** Quality sleep is essential for brain development, especially in areas related to decision-making, impulse control, and emotional regulation.
- **Emotional well-being:** Sleep aids in emotional regulation, stress reduction, and is closely linked to mental health.

Given the demands teenagers face from school, social life, and extracurricular activities, it is crucial for them to meet these sleep needs. It is recommended that teenagers aim for 8-10 hours of good quality sleep a night.

Barriers to good sleep

There are many reasons that teenagers don't get good quality sleep. These might be:

- Hormonal changes during puberty will sometimes impact on a child's ability to fall and stay asleep.
- Academic or extracurricular pressures may be causing a young person to feel the need to stay up late.
- Use of electronic devices late into the night can be a significant barrier to a good night sleep.
- Peer pressures may encourage a young person to stay up late to engage social activities.
- Mental health issues may make it difficult for a young person to fall asleep. They may be worried or anxious.

Snapchat: A leading social media platform for kids

Despite the minimum age requirement of 13, many younger children sign up for Snapchat as there is no age verification process.

Here are some safety tips for parents and carers of children who use the app.

KEEPING YOUR CHILD SAFE ON SNAPCHAT

