

---

# I N S I G H T S

---

FOR FAMILIES



## Understanding Your Screenager



**September  
2018**

INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Most teens are glued to their devices, and many spend more time online than at school. Having a phone and connecting with friends — even when currently with them — is as essential as breathing. This is why obsession with devices and access to technology, apps and the internet are becoming a new category of addiction.

### Teenagers = Screenagers

Tech-addicted teens have inspired the name Screenagers, “techno-savvy young people, reared on television and computers.” The term was coined in 1997 by author Douglas Rushkoff who argued that young people who grow up with technology will have advantages in processing information. In other words, technology will change the way we think.

The term has more recently been used to title a documentary studying the effects of screen time on young people. *Screenagers: Growing up in the Digital Age*, is a study of screen use among kids and its effect on attention — and the way we think. As we learn more, the advantages of technology as a means of improving thinking are in doubt.

*Screenagers* is an effort to understand the impact of technology on kids. “Physician and filmmaker Delaney Ruston saw her own kids and learned that the average kid spends 6.5 hours a day looking at screens. She wondered about the impact of all this time and about the friction occurring in homes and schools around negotiating screen time — friction she knew all too well”

“SCREENAGERS reveals how tech time impacts kids’ development and offers solutions on how adults can empower kids to best navigate the digital world and find balance.”

[www.screenagersmovie.com/](http://www.screenagersmovie.com/)

### The impact of technology on kids and teens

Research into the effects of technology on kids’ brain development is a relatively new field, and researchers are measuring the effects as use of and exposure to devices increases. According to Delaney, studies have shown that “excessive use of screens could harm the physical development of young people’s brains. Studies show a correlation between too much screen time and worse attention spans, as well as negative effects on learning. <https://nyti.ms/2hZo7ld>

Overuse of the internet is also inked with sleep disorders, depression and anxiety, drug/alcohol use, poor academic performance, and poor social adjustment. Internet use that interferes with social, educational or work responsibilities is a red flag to set and enforce strong clear limits. <https://bit.ly/2OKTKuw>

(Over)

## **How much is too much screen time?**

Parents, and teens themselves, know that screen limits are important, but they are hard to set and harder to follow. “Teens struggle with self-control, just like adults, and they know that playing Call of Duty or watching Netflix for eight hours straight is a less productive use of their time than practicing the piano or writing an essay.”

According to Delaney, simply taking a phone away is not a good strategy. Teens need to understand why they need to limit screen time. “Part of developing self-control is understanding and believing in a goal,” she said. “Once they are sold on the idea of limiting screen time, create boundaries with their input, so the rules don’t seem arbitrary and unfair. Draw up a contract so that kids understand what is expected of them.”

## **Identifying and treating internet addiction**

Teens who won’t self-police or follow family screen time rules may be addicted to their phones. Internet addiction is not officially a clinical diagnosis — it hasn’t yet been recognized by the American Association of Psychiatry, which defines addiction based on the following characteristics:

- Negative consequences: problems with relationships, work, school, and more
- Tolerance: wanting to engage more and more to get the same affect
- Withdrawal: anxiousness, physical symptoms and more when away from it
- Unable to stop: Serious difficulties with trying to cut down or stop

There are, treatment programs related to internet obsession and excessive use. And helpful online resources for parents and teens.

Start with the Questionnaire for Problematic Use tht is posted on the Screenagers film site. Written for video game addiction, it could also apply to general internet or social media addiction: [www.screenagersmovie.com/internet-addiction/](http://www.screenagersmovie.com/internet-addiction/)

## **Tips and resources for teens and their parents**

**Think your kid (or you) could be a screen zombie? Take the ‘Screenagers’ test**  
[www.latimes.com/health/la-he-screen-zombies-20160227-story.html](http://www.latimes.com/health/la-he-screen-zombies-20160227-story.html)

### **Learning how to exert self control**

[www.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/opinion/sunday/learning-self-control.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/opinion/sunday/learning-self-control.html)

### **Compulsive Texting Associated with Poorer School Performance Among Girls**

[www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2015/10/compulsive-texting-girls.aspx](http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2015/10/compulsive-texting-girls.aspx)

### **Compulsive Texting Takes Toll on Teenagers**

<https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/10/12/compulsive-texting-takes-toll-on-teenagers/?mtrref=undefined>

### **Teaching Self-Control Tips**

[www.parentingscience.com/teaching-self-control.html](http://www.parentingscience.com/teaching-self-control.html)