What Every Parent Needs to Know about Technology

Did you know that many games, apps, and social media outlets are intentionally designed to be addictive?

Could technology be monopolizing more of your time than you would like? Here are some questions you may want to ask yourself:

- Do you check email before doing something more important?
- Do you stay online more than you intended?
- Do you lose sleep because of late night logins?
- Do others complain of how long you spend online?
- Do you say just a few minutes more when on line?

The book, “Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked” by Adam Alter discusses technological addiction. It is a great read if you have the time. If not, here are some highlights from this book and a few others:

Technological devices, apps, games etc. lend themselves toward behavioral addiction. Behavioral addiction draws us in with elements of human need such as social support, social engagement, and a sense of effectiveness.

Video games keep us hooked by creating “compelling goals just beyond reach, irresistible and positive feedback, sense of incremental progress and improvement, tasks become more difficult over time, unresolved tensions that demand resolution, and strong social connections.” “Gamers play certain games days on end because they are driven to complete certain missions,and because they form social ties that bind them to other gamers.”

Social media can also lend itself to compulsive and addictive behaviors. Social media sites like FaceBook and Instagram are addictive because they capitalize on our human need for social approval. Getting a “like” or being “tagged” in a post is an indicator that someone is thinking of us. This leads us to obsessively check to see who is liking our posts and returning to the site to follow friends.

What are the downsides to technology addiction?
For one thing, technology can lead to uninvited goals. Perhaps your priorities are getting work done, spending time with friends and loved ones, etc. However, your time is spent on unintended goals such as increasing likes on social media, 0 unread messages on the inbox, breaking the existing score on a video game. While our phones provide convenience to some extent, did you know that the average person picks up their phone approximately 39 times a day? Apps with push notices and alerts draw us to our phones and draw our attention away from the activity at hand.

Technology is creating an addiction that is impairing social relationships, minimizing our interactions with others, and creating a loss in the ability to freely stop the behavior. Technology can detract from social interactions and water down the imagination. Face to face interactions teach you how to communicate and tech provides less opportunity for this turning children into poor communicators. Kids are becoming less sensitive to emotional cues. By texting or posting a negative comment, the person loses the opportunity to express empathy, by seeing the other person's reaction.

People often feel less happy after using social media. Viewing pictures of what others are doing leads to social comparison. Most people post about the fun they are having (or seemingly having). There is a human tendency toward social comparison. We compare ourselves to people who are perceived to have more than we do. We look at what others have, the fun things they are doing, and who they are with and suddenly our life doesn't seem so great.

What can parents do? In the book "Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World," Cal Newport suggests asking yourself, "What do I value and what is the best way I can use technology to maximize my values?" You are more likely to become distracted by apps on your phone. He suggests taking apps off your phone such as news feeds, social media, email, and anything else that draws your attention away from the things you value. You are more likely to check these apps/sites more often if they are on your phone due to the proximity of your phone. Instead, keep your usage limited to your desktop.

Here are some some more questions to ask yourself:

- What rules do you have for phone, internet usage, and social media?
- How a parent models their phone will be modeled by the child.
- How far away is your phone from you ? Is it next to you at night?
- If your child is spending unhealthy amounts of time on social media, what void are they trying to fill? Are they lonely, trying to fit in, belong, escape?

You may not be able to lose technology all together but you can limit it. Here are a few suggestions:

- Dr. Kimberly S. Young has set the following time guidelines for regulating technology with children: 3-6 years: One hour per day; 6-9 years: supervised use up to two hours per day; 9-12 years: No more than 2 hours per day
- Set boundaries (phones out of bedroom at night, no usage at dinner table, etc)
- Set rules that homework and chores are done first to earn time on screens.
- Keep technology usage to open areas of the home.
- Do not allow access to online gaming
- Be aware of the social media apps your child uses.
- Disable email notifications and try to check your email infrequently preferably on a desktop rather than mobile device.
- Schedule some tech free family time (board games, puzzles, nature walks, sports).

- Here are some apps to check out:
    - *Entertainment Software Rating Board App* (free) to decide appropriateness of game.
    - *Demetricator App* which dulls feedback by eliminating friend counts of “likes” on social media.
    - *Waste No Time App* which imposes time limits on sites, add sites to block list

Resources

“Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World,” Cal Newport

“Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked” by Adam Alter

What Parents Can Do About Technology Addiction at Home: Parenting Guidelines: Rules for Every Age by Kimberly S. Young