



6 Ways to Wean Teens from Screens

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I’ve rarely met a parent who claims, “I love how much time my kids spend glued to their phones!”

The fact is that most the research emerging is revealing the more time kids spend communicating through screens, the more difficult it is for them to communicate face-to-face.¹ Many studies show, young people who are clocking in more hours of screen time have less close friends.

As one expert puts it, “The result is a decline in intimate friendships. Instead, many young people now derive personal support and affirmation from LIKES and feedback to their postings.”²

Isn’t this where Doctor Phil would ask, “Well, how’s that working out for ya?”

With the rise in dangerous social media apps, researchers are taking a closer peek at why some young people are drawn to social media. Some experts are even going as far as to recommend, don’t let young children under 12 have any handheld devices.³ Even if that sounds severe, everyone agrees, once your kids begin using social media, parents should regularly engage in conversations with them about their experiences and set realistic guardrails to help them keep social media safe.

So what does this look like in your world? How can you help your kids not become dangerously dependent on screens?

The following are some ideas I’ve seen produce positive results.

6 Ideas to Wean Teen from Screens

1. Don't freak out!

Overreaction won't help here. If you declare war on tech, you might just lose your kids as allies. This generation has grown up with tech close at hand. Think twice before yanking it away heedlessly. Best selling author Shaunti Feldhahn warns parents, if you take away your kid's phone, you are dropping the "nuclear bomb of punishments."⁴ Save the biggest consequences for the biggest infractions. Make sure you have thought through the effectiveness of this ploy, because I think you'll find you have a few better options...

2. Introduce "No-Tech Tuesday."

We currently do this in our home. No phones (except for homework Q's), no Internet, no TV... no tech at all. We read, do homework and play games if time permits on Tuesdays. Funny, my oldest daughter, now in college, looks back and wishes we had more evenings than just Tuesday!

3. Encourage face-to-face activities.

Church groups, sports, dance class, clubs... anything where they interact with others face-to-face and learn to get along. Chances are they are going to have to sit in the same room and dialogue with a boss someday. It would be nice if it weren't a new experience.

4. Slowly incorporate some daily times where you set tech aside.

At my house, no one brings tech to the dinner table, then we all do the dishes together. I'm constantly surprised how much fun we have talking while doing the dishes. The "no tech" isn't a huge punishment for this time, we just "pause" from tech for these few moments together each day.

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5. Escape civilization on occasion.

Go camping, hiking, boating, or dirt biking... somewhere with no cell reception!
Get your kids outdoors and interacting with others.

6. Take your kids on an overseas mission trip or service project.

Trips like these can be eye opening. My kids did four years of missions trips in high school and reflect on those experiences as some of the most impactful in their entire life. My oldest daughter felt the same about her trip to Uganda last year. Expand your kids' worldview; it might make them think twice before they demand the newest iPhone.

So what are you still sitting there staring at your screen for?

Grab your kid and teach him how to throw a Frisbee!

1. <http://www.jonathanmckeewrites.com/archive/2014/04/24/social-media-irony.aspx>
2. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/health/social-media-affecting-teens-concepts-of-friendship-intimacy-1.2543158>
3. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cris-rowan/10-reasons-why-handheld-devices-should-be-banned_b_4899218.html
4. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/askshaunti/2014/04/worst-dad-like-ever/>

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