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Must be present to win

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The Scary Truths of Youth Internet Addiction

Mike Eiden, LCSW, LCADC, CSAT, CCS, PhD Candidate

2



Michelle Massey, M.Ed.
Operation Parent

- 7 years designing prevention education for Parents
- 20+ years Higher Education Leadership, Housing and Residence Life
- Proud Mom
- Most Scared of Snakes!



3

Amanda Flaherty, BA Marketing
Operation Parent



- Social Media Specialist
- Just had my 1-year anniversary
- Passionate to reach and empower more families with prevention education
- Most Scared of Spiders!



4

Mike Eiden, LCSW, LCADC, CSAT, CCS
Eiden Integrative Counseling



- 10 years working in mental health treatment
- Dissertation focuses on responding to addictive screen use
- Proud owner of 11 chickens
- Most Scared of bears



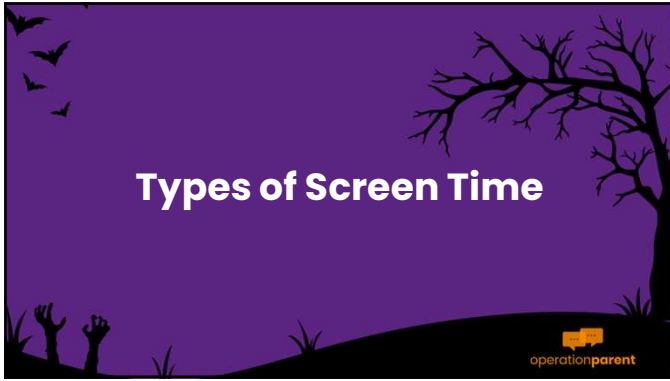
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Objectives

- 1 Explore the many types of youth addictive screen behavior
- 2 Identify signs and developmental consequences of screen addiction
- 3 Learn effective intervention and prevention strategies



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Current U.S. Data Related to Screen Use

Ages	Avg. Hours Spent Using Screens Each Day
8-12	4-6 Hours
13-18	9 Hours
>18	10+ Hours

1/2 of children in industrialized countries have a personal tablet
Rideout & Robb, 2020

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2020

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Interactive vs. Passive Screen Use

Interactive/Active

- Regular interfacing with device
 - Able to manipulate level of stimulation/arousal
- More likely to cause increase in nervous system activation, activates addictive process
- Prolonged exposure puts body into chronic stress state

Passive

- Watching TV or movies from across the room
 - While on singular device

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Recommendations for Screen Use

Ages	Suggested Screen Time Per Day
Birth – 3 yrs.	None if possible
3 – 6 yrs.	90 minutes of passive use, no interactive use
6 – 12 yrs.	90 minutes of passive, less than 60 minutes of interactive
12 – 18 yrs.	Limit to 2 hours of interactive use

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2020). *Screen time and children*.
American Academy of Pediatrics (2022). *Down time from screen time*.

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2 Types of Screen Time

The Goal For Parents: Establish balance between HDA and LDA activities

High Dopamine Activities (HDA)
Instantly and constantly stimulating

Low Dopamine Activities (LDA)
Require delayed gratification

On Screens:

- Video Games
- Social Media
- Web Surfing

Off Screens:

- Drugs
- Alcohol
- Gambling

On Screens:

- Word Processing
- Apps like Power Point/Photoshop
- Programming

Off Screen:

- Exercise
- Homework
- Board Games
- Reading

Source: @DrBassmanMD.com

Managing your Teens Excessive Gaming
Dr. Clifford Sussman
<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/39705766/02850329888>

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Social Media Red Flags from Handbook

- Age-inappropriate content
- Anonymity
- Location tracking/sharing
- Cyberbullying
- "Temporary" pictures & videos
- Secret chat rooms

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BIG CONCERN: Access to Drugs

- Fake pills are easily accessible and often sold on social media
- Available to anyone with a smartphone
- More than an emoji:
 - 🚀 **Rocket = high potency**
 - 🔌 **Plug = I'll hook you up**
 - 👙 **Roxy shorts in size m30 = oxy**





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Sexting

The action or practice of using a computer or mobile device to perform the following activities (not an exhaustive list):

- Sending**
 - sexually suggestive written messages
 - or receiving erotic pictures of sexually suggestive content or nude pictures
- Sharing**
 - pornographic literature, pictures, or video pornography
- Using**
 - a mobile device as a visual or auditory aid for mutual masturbation




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Sexting Continued...

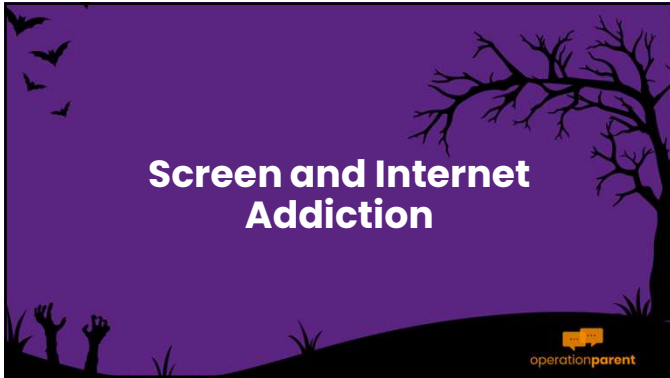
Normative behavior for adolescents and adults
Follows stages of courtship: noticing, observing, flirting, and demonstration.

Problematic when it's a part of a compulsive pattern

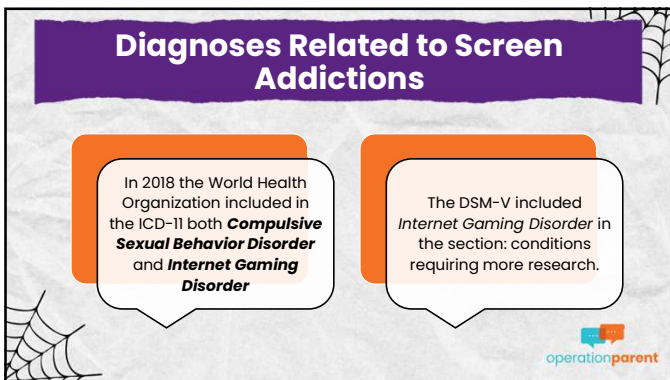
- **Endless novelty**
 - can be achieved through dating apps, Discord chat, Reddit forums, Snapchat
 - The pursuit of **endless novelty** found in gaming and pornography can be mirrored with task switching between social media & dating apps where erotic messaging can occur
 - People might not respond like pornography does and compulsion can lead to aggression/urgency



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Collateral Signs of Screen & Internet Addiction

Insomnia & chronic sleep issues
Rapid weight loss or obesity
Raging, violence, or age-inappropriate tantrums related to screen use limits
Lack of interest in non-screen related activities
Difficulty with lack of screen time or head-phones at meals

Difficulty with embodiment
Extreme methods of deceit, lying, or manipulation to gain screen access
Marked impairment in executive functioning not better explained by ADHD, ASD, sensory processing disorders
Little tolerance for distress



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Why are games, social media & pornography addicting?





Dopamine

- a neurotransmitter that is associated with the experience of pleasure and euphoria.
- directly connected to our body's survival system:


Food
Sex
Exercise
Social belonging



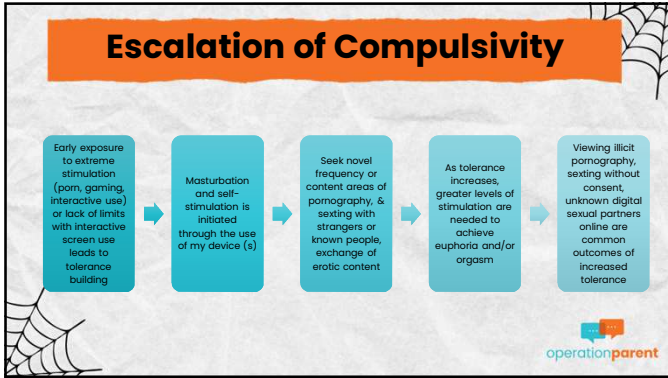
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-  Pornography, gaming, discussion forums (sexting), social media, Youtube - super stimulus
-  Abnormal super stimulus has the brain register false evolutionary benefit
-  Games including sexualized avatars & embedded gambling (loot boxes)
-  Rhythmic novelty seeking


Dopamine



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Regulators of Mood

Arousal


- Getting revved up, high thrill, increase in energy

Satiation

- Getting numb, eases tension and discomfort

Fantasy

- Escaping boring, mundane, or painful realities with fantastical worlds and experiences



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Fantasy

Porn, gaming, and social media use can all tap into compelling and archetypal elements of fantasy

- Who I get to be in the virtual world and the intensely pleasurable experiences I have there can quickly escalate into **compulsivity**
- Able to curate a specific persona and minimize emotional risk involved in connection

People go online for what they get to Do and stay for who they get to BE!




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One Device to Rule Them All




Handheld devices are capable of housing all the same entertainment content



Devices are all used for the same purpose as opposed to distinct separation based on tasks



Education system becoming more screen dependent at earlier stages of development



What if a chronic alcoholic had to take the SAT in a bar?



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Parent Gaming Addiction Resources

Children and Screens

www.childrenandscreens.com
www.youtube.com/@ChildrenandScreens
 Elaine Uskoski







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All Revved Up And Nowhere To Go

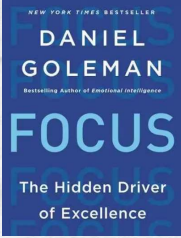
- Our nervous systems have evolved to keep track of quick changes, bright colors, loud noises, and changing landscapes by raising the arousal in our bodies to stay vigilant and defend against threat
- Interactive screen use including: **gaming, Youtube,** and **social media activate the limbic system** and **require nervous system to engage fight or flight to keep up with stimulation, induces chronic stress state** (Dunckley, 2015)
- **Task switching,** long exposures to interactive screen use, and blue light toned light (suppresses melatonin production) negatively impacts restorative sleep




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Task Switching

- **'Multi-tasking' is a myth**
- Task switching gradually decreases cognitive control on task of focus
- Chronic task switching causes **abundance** of neural activity not associated with task to light up, increasing likelihood for distraction & impairs ability to omit irrelevant information



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
DANIEL GOLEMAN
Bestselling Author of Emotional Intelligence
FOCUS
The Hidden Driver of Excellence



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Co-regulation & Attunement

- Our nervous systems are designed to co-regulate by **borrowing the stability of larger, more stable nervous systems in times of distress** (Porges, 2011; Siegel & Hartzell, 2014)
- This co-regulation fosters **attachment** and allows us to know we have a safe and secure base to return to when life becomes challenging or scary
- Functional attunement
 - Caregiver attunes to child's nonverbal cues
 - Impacts language development, social skills, emotional regulation, trauma resilience
 - French—"Virtual Autism"




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AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM AS A LADDER


VENTRAL VAGAL ACTIVATION
Attitude: "I am feeling at ease and can manage whatever comes my way. I feel empowered and connected. I see the "big picture" and connect to the world and people in it."

SYMPATHETIC ACTIVATION
Attitude: "I am getting overwhelmed and having trouble keeping up. I feel anxious and irritated. The world seems demanding, chaotic and unhelpful."

DORSAL VAGAL ACTIVATION
Attitude: "I am buried under things and I can't get out. I'm alone in my thoughts. The world is empty, dead and dark."



Autonomic Ladder



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Screen Use and Parent-Child Relations


The negative impact on attunement and responsiveness to attachment cues goes both ways

Parents become:

- hyper-aroused,
- over-stimulated, and
- more likely to respond to threat

Parental media use and 'technoference' related to:

- more externalizing behavior symptoms
- negative emotional responses
- self-regulation difficulties in children




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Screen Use and Parent-Child Relations Cont.

Parent screen use is likely to shape preschoolers' later screen use habits (Lee et al., 2022)

Parents' media use and family use during mealtime also contributed to increased preschooler screen time (Birken et al., 2011)

Tip: Ask Youth to put their phones in a basket on the table if they would like to eat.



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Effects of Technology on Brain Development
Dr. Crystal Collier

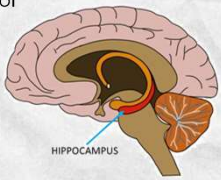
<https://attendeegotowebinar.com/recording/3188081669818878209>





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Dr. Collier's Key Points

- Hippocampus (where we store all of our memories) is shrinking
 - Shows cognitive impairment
- **USE IT OR LOSE IT!**
 - Not using it enough for a variety of purposes
- Googling more than memorizing






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Screenagers

- **Podcasts with SAMHSA**
TTHV PODCAST Episode #15: Back-to-School: Connecting with Your "Screenagers" (July 28, 2023)
Screenagers Podcast: When Screen Time Rules Are Broken (iibsyn.com) (July 11, 2023)
- **Blog**
Screenagers Blog | What High Schoolers Really Think About Phones in the Classroom: Survey Results Are In! (screenagersmovie.com)
- **Handout**
screenagersmovie.com/resources/internet-addiction






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Examples of Attachment Ruptures and Screen Use to Compensate

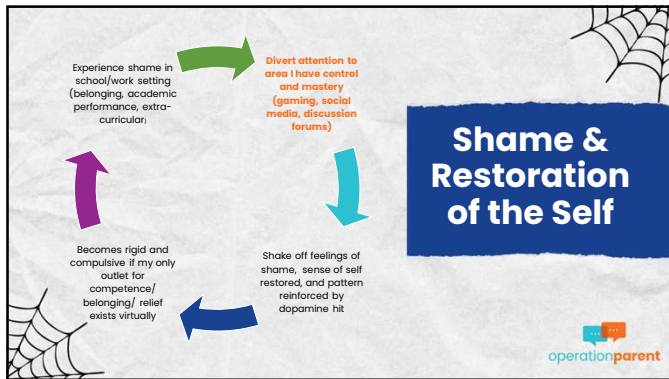
*"Mom and Dad are arguing for several hours, no one comes to talk to me about how I'm feeling, I get so anxious I become nauseous and watch 3 hours of **TikTok** reels with the TV on in the background so I can fall asleep"*

*"I had a bad day at school and when I tried to talk to Mom/Dad about it they seemed really busy. I know they both work a lot. I tried doing homework but was so distracted by how sad I was I couldn't stop scrolling **Instagram** and lost track of time. My homework got turned in late and then my parents were upset with me."*

*"When Dad gets angry it makes me nervous. It's hard to tell him how anxious I get when he's upset so I try to stay calm about it. **At night I get restless and that's usually when I'll scroll social media and message people on apps until I can fall asleep.**"*



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Impact of Screen Addiction on Language Development

- Observed negative brain alterations in Broca's area and the occipital lobe
- Theory of mind abilities, visual system, and cognitive control functions were all found to be altered in internet-related addictions**
 - (Dong, Zhou, & Zhao, 2011; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016)
- FMRI Study:
 - "emphasize that beside the brain's reward and inhibitory control systems, the language system is the next candidate to be involved in the pathogenesis of IUD (Darnai et al, 2022)"

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Screen Addiction with Neurodiverse Clients

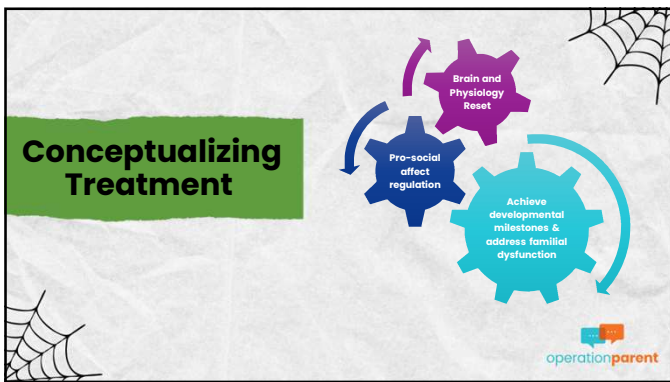
- Screen addiction can mirror certain traits of ADHD or Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or exacerbate symptoms (remember that ADHD/ASD are neurodevelopmental)
- Overwhelmed stress state leading into cycle behaviors that include **stimming** (visual and tactile) and includes a dopamine hit at the end
- Elements of screen addiction may have their roots in attempts to stim that have become rigid/extreme
 - Task switching**, bold graphics, rapidly changing videos—visual stimming
 - Tapping and texting**—tactile stimming
- Ensure care is given to **sensory diet exploration** that is non-screen related

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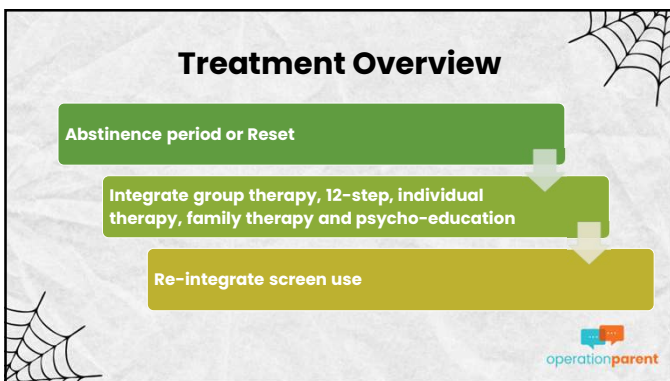
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Abstinence Period


- Dr. Dunckley recommends at least 3 weeks
- Dr. Hilarie Cash uses at least 90-day model
- Total screen abstinence, best to approach as a family experiment
- Can be done at home; based on needs and current risk or severity may need to happen in residential setting



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Abstinence Period Cont.


- Safety plan
- Sweep the house & secure devices
- Install improved life balancing behaviors with focus on exercise, socializing, and nutrition
- Maintain strict sleep schedule
- Support team for parents



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Early Intervention

<p>Abstinence Period</p> <p>-Gets the client's brain out of a compulsive state and into a healing one. Next bring in clinical interventions</p> <p>*Ensure parents have united front before starting abstinence period</p>	<p>Family Help</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish BALANCE in young person's life, will feel forced at first, they often need parents to shoulder the burden initially • Focus on healthy attachment opportunities <p>*Deep family support in reconnecting.</p>
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Therapeutic Treatment Planning

***Family systems treatment model works best. It's a family experiment!**

- Depending on the **age** of the client and onset of compulsivity, treatment needs can be comprehensive or minimal
- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Peer support & 12-step
- Psycho-education

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Interventions

Recovery	Psycho-education	Individual Therapy	Family therapy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonding with others in 12-step community or peer led groups • Online Gamers Anonymous, Sex Addicts Anonymous, Internet and Technology Addiction Anonymous (small but growing communities) • 3 circles for sex addiction, gaming disorder, and/or screen addiction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neuroscience related to addiction, hyperarousal, and interactive screen use • Intent is to reduce shame & confusion related to screen/gaming/porn use and provide accurate explanation • Psycho-ed for parents related to emotional boundaries, support towards autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on developing new regulation strategies that are pro-social • EMDR • Navigating missed developmental milestones to improve functioning • Create needed boundaries for tech use with addiction potential in mind • Parts work • Arousal management skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing how relationship with screen use began and spun out of control • Address emotional injuries, attachment disruptions during screen addiction • Provide support for abstinence period accountability • Family addresses modeling of appropriate screen use

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12-Step Support

- **CGAA** (Computer Gaming Addicts Anonymous)
- **OLGA** (On-Line Gamers Anonymous)
 - www.olganon.org
 - Forums, chatrooms, and Meetings
- **ITAA** (Internet and Technology Addicts Anonymous)
 - internetaddictsanonymous.org
- **Tips- Detach with love, Stop enabling, and Take care of yourself DA** (Debtors Anonymous)
 - [Debtors Anonymous - Meetings, Support, Groups and Programs - Debtors Anonymous](#)
- **UA** (Underearners Anonymous)
 - underearnersanonymous.org

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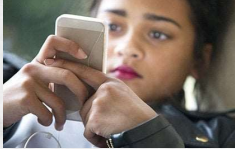

Screen Re-Integration Plan

Follows a period of abstinence and is trial/error based

- Focus on connecting socially & task completion
- Solo entertainment based screen use is lowest priority & included last

Examples:

- Child gets 30 minutes of phone time to connect with friends using a 'dumb' phone 2x per week for 2 weeks
- Child can use PC to complete hw in 30-minute intervals while supervised

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Examples of Mindful Technology Use

Doing homework in common area of house, where my use can be monitored, on a PC with content blockers for social media, gaming & Youtube


Only using 1 screen at a time with intentional time limits

Maintain balance through structured daily activities & set screen time (not 'earned' time)

Using a Gabb phone or "dumb" phone

Identify internal mechanisms of elevated arousal & use cool down periods

Bookending screen time with sensory deprivation & mindfulness meditation (sitting or walking)




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Managing Physiological Arousal

- Help clients learn how to **track** signs of heightened arousal
- Use brief **structured respiration practices** vs mindfulness with 'organic' breathing
 - **Reduces physiological arousal and enhances mood**
 - Focus on cyclic sighing
 - Box breathing
 - Wimhof
 - Cyclic hyperventilation

Balban et al. (2023). Brief structured respiration practices enhance mood and reduce physiological arousal.



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Using Fantasy in Therapy

People go to video games, pornography, and social media for **what they get to DO, and stay for who they get to BE**

- **Social media** and my persona
- **Pornography** content as a mirror of arousal template and/or trauma
 - Explore themes in kinds of pornography consumed

Look for compelling or dominant themes in video games

- What role or character do I like to be?
- What story is appealing to me?



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Types of Parental Intervention with Screen Use

Active Mediation

- Dialogue and active discussion about types of media usage
- Dialogue respects and places emphasis on child's perspective, autonomy, and self-determination


Restrictive Mediation

- Rule making
- Concrete limit setting
- Use of filtering, blocking, tracking apps

Co-Using

- Using the media along with the child whether TV, web surfing, gaming
- Does not involve discussion

From meta-analysis conducted in 2019, Chen and Shi



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Parental Intervention Effectiveness

Active Mediation

- Suggests a reduction in total screen time and reduction in risky social media use, privacy disclosure, and cyberbullying
- Cultivates critical stance toward media
- Changes attitude towards pornography and TV violence


Restrictive Mediation

- Associated with decrease in sexual solicitations, time spent on screens, and exposure to cyberbullying
- Can have 'boomerang' effect of increasing positive attitudes towards pornography, violence in gaming and TV, and risky social media behavior if not paired with active mediation

Co-Using

- Currently producing mixed results
- May improve level of learning associated with media use but may also increase screen time and media induced escalation of aggression

(Chen & Shi, 2019)



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So, what can parents do?

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For Parents

Set time limits

- Time spent browsing
- Bedtime shutdowns
- Homework time
- Overall device time

You decide which apps are allowed and which are not

Family dinners

Prevent access

- Filters on the device
- Filters on the network
- Turn on safe search

Watch webinars with Family Tech

- Digital Parenting
- Making the Internet Safe

www.operationparent.org/webinars

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Tips for Healthy Habits

Phones

- Keep phones **out of bedroom at night, no TV in bedroom**
- **Turn off notifications** on all apps except call and text
- When using laptop or tablet for work/school keep in separate room
- Don't keep on physical person while in your living space
- Turn color contrast off on phone

Screens

- Keep stimulating interactive screen use to 30-minute windows with sensory deprivation, exercise, or structured breathing breaks in between
- Screen use breaks can be useful even if not meeting full addiction criteria

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Screen Time for Teens

- Maintain boundaries that screen use occurs after responsibilities and socializing is completed
- Use blockers and filters & start with dumb phone
- Allow autonomy and privacy as child gets older
- Keep mindless, entertainment-based activities to singular device

Parents make the screen boundaries and do not use 'earned time' concept

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2020). Screen time and children.
American Academy of Pediatrics (2022). Down time from screen time.



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So, how can communities help?



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Supporting Communities

Workshops for parents, grandparents, foster parents

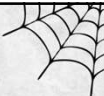

Hosting group watch of webinars

Staying current with research and popular apps so you know the concerns


Promote technology-free events for youth (i.e. libraries, sports, art classes, etc.)





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So, how can schools help?




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Schools

- Limit Phone use at School
- Set up content filters
- White Ribbon Week
- Technology-free activities
 - Research without using Google

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Key Takeaways

Excessive screen use and related problems with children result from their inability to self-regulate super-stimulus with a developing brain


Interactive screen use limitations need to be adjusted with growth

Active dialogue, age-appropriate sex-ed and tech-ed, and open lines of communication is the greatest protective factor for children's harm related to screen use

Screen breaks are important for EVERYONE

Parental modeling is a huge factor in screen use patterns for children

Get support from other parents, therapists, and community members for yourselves!



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Recommended Reading

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Resources

- RestartLife
- <https://www.restartlife.com>
- Access screens/assessments related to gaming and problematic screen use
- <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page17566.aspx>
- Reset Your Child's Brain
- <https://drdunckley.com/reset-your-childs-brain/>

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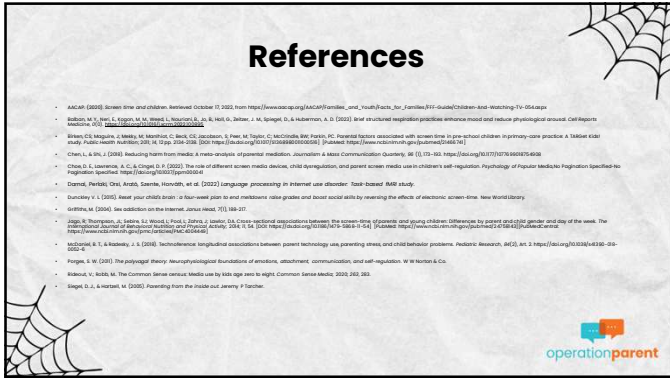
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Resources

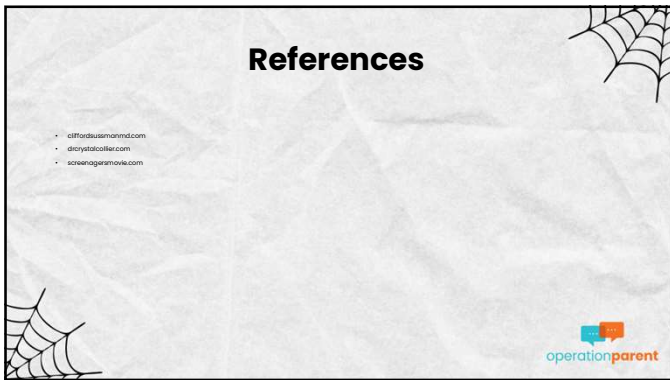
- Video Game ESRB Ratings: <https://www.esrb.org/>
- Common Sense Media: <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>
- White Ribbon Week: <https://www.whiteribbonweek.org/>
- Family Tech: <https://familytechzone.com/>
- Song For Charlie: <https://songforcharlie.org/>

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Prevention Resource

**Parents
Foster Parents
Grandparents**

Middle/High: \$14.99
Elementary: \$9.99

NEW EDITION

MIDDLE | HIGH SCHOOL

EXPANDED SECTIONS:
SOCIAL MEDIA, VAPING, FENTANYL,
GAMING, AND MENTAL HEALTH

CITED WITH EVIDENCE
BASED SOURCES

products@operationparent.org www.operationparent.org/store operationparent

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Drug Prevention Event

This toolkit contains everything you need to host and promote a successful drug prevention event.





products@operationparent.org operationparent

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Free Webinars

OUR FREE WEBINARS DIVE DEEPER INTO THE TOUGHEST PARENTING ISSUES WITH LEADING EXPERTS

- Cell Phones
- Anxiety
- Vaping
- Bullying
- Gaming
- Drugs
- Eating Disorders
- Depression
- Social Media
- Alcohol
- Relationships

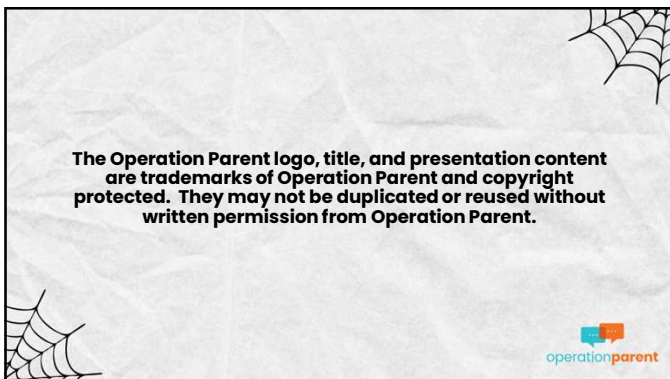
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