

Finding the Social Media & Technology Balance

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Stop scrolling, and put your phone down. It sounds easy; however, it is difficult for many of us. When social media platforms first came out many teens and young adults couldn't wait to sign up. I remember the days of MySpace, and when Facebook first launched. They were the "thing" to have for teens, and most adults didn't want anything to do with them. Now? Almost everyone is connected in some way to social media or e-mail. Social media and technology help us connect with others, which is great. However, what are we sacrificing while big companies are benefiting? We are missing out on the face to face interaction from being in the same room with someone and sharing a conversation with them. If there is anything the last 8-9 months have taught me, it is that video and phone calls are great, but they are not the ideal situation. They cannot replace a conversation with another person, in the same room, without a screen separating us.

When meeting with patients, I often ask about their social media and screen time usage. Numerous studies continue to show the negative impact social media and technology usage have on teens and young adults. We talk to parents about limiting their child's screen time, but are we encouraging parents to model the same behavior? Are we modeling the same behavior? I recently found the section on my phone that shows me my phone usage, down to each app per day. It also showed me how many times, on average, I unlock my phone throughout the day. I realized that sometimes I unlock my phone just to check and see if I have messages. As if my notifications were not enough. I need to physically go in and check to see if I have a message I missed. Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't. Now, that's a classic intermittent reinforcement schedule if I ever saw one.

Below are some helpful tips that might help decrease our social media and technology usage:

- Devices out of the bedroom by a certain time. If you absolutely need your phone as your alarm clock, perhaps find an area further from your bed to keep your phone at night.
- Set a screen and/or app time each day. Most phones come with this feature already installed. Talk to your children about how much time they think they should be allowed to have on their devices. Their answers might surprise you.
- Set an appropriate age for when devices and social media accounts are allowed.
- Follow your child's social media accounts and monitor their activity.
- If your child has a password on their phone, ask them to share it with you. There shouldn't be any issues if they have nothing to hide, right?
- Talk to your children about social media etiquette. If they wouldn't say or show it in person, they probably shouldn't be posting it.

- Technology and social media don't need to be the enemy. Ask each family member to share something they liked or found funny/interesting each night.
- Structure when and where phones and electronic devices can be. If the rule for your child is no phone at the dinner table, model that rule and leave your phone in the other room.

There's no secret that social media platforms and other technologies use algorithms to help maintain their client base. They know how long we are looking at something, what we want to see, and what we want to watch. Perhaps it's time we create our own system or algorithm to maintain our family and personal time!