



WHY ARE KIDS ADDICTED TO TECHNOLOGY?

VETERAN MENTORS



The Veteran Mentors are a group of ex-servicemen and women who have come together to help Australian youth, their families and their communities to overcome common personal challenges.

Utilising skills and lessons acquired through military training and deployment, the Veteran Mentors are equipped to provide critical lessons in respect, resilience, teamwork and courage.

We also help kids to understand the importance of developing self-esteem and meaningful relationships with friends and family.

Through conducting programs like the Junior Leader Program, our Veteran Mentors have assisted Aussie kids to conquer a range of challenges, encompassing everything from self-confidence issues to technology addiction and everything in between. This e-Book has been designed to help deal with teen addiction to technology.

What is technology addiction?

Did you know that the average person looks at their phone between 50 - 150 times a day? That's an average of around 4-6 hours spent in front of a tiny screen and you have to wonder how else that time could have been spent. When we take a look at these figures, it's no wonder that our children are exhibiting anti social behaviours at school and at home.

But why do we all spend so much time glued to our phones, tablets & laptops when it's we know it to be poor for our health?

Devices and other digital platforms are designed in a way that keeps us wanting more, even **NEEDING** more. Large corporations have realised the potential in devices that deliver notifications 24/7 and the potential earnings they can make off the back of serving you advertising every time you reach for your phone. It's beneficial to companies to continue to develop their platforms in a way that encourages unhealthy attachment. By creating these attachments, companies are given more chances to dish up their marketing communications and therefore more chances of cashing in off their users.

Unfortunately though, it's our children who really suffer from the small hits of gratification they get from the buzz of a notification in their pocket.



Why are we addicted?

Social media and other digital platforms are specifically designed to keep us engaged. And the more we engage, the more we want to engage, and therein starts the cycle of addiction.

Every time we receive a notification, whether it be a like, a comment or new follow request, our brain releases the chemical dopamine. This is the very same chemical that is released when we smoke, drink, take drugs and gamble.

If you consider that there are laws in place that prevent young people from accessing these kinds of vices before their brain has sufficiently developed, it seems absurd that we allow, or even encourage children to run rampant on social media and other digital platforms.

When we're young, we haven't developed coping mechanisms to deal with stress and anxiety. We're also more susceptible to addiction than any other time in our lives. This is because the section of the brain that controls planning and habit formation is inextricably linked to how reward is perceived. This essentially means that the reward factor plays a bigger part in making decisions than potential consequences.

A like, a comment or follow is a small reward so you're naturally more likely to seek out more and more rewards which can often result in a change in your child's perception of themselves and the real world.





Results of technology addiction

Similar to the way an alcoholic will turn to the bottle in times of stress, a person with an addiction to technology will turn to their devices in order to find comfort in difficult situations. This perpetuates their addiction and diminishes their ability to form deep and meaningful connections with their peers, especially when this behaviour is learned at a young age. In a time where adolescents are constantly seeking approval from their peers, the inability to develop real and lasting relationships can have a massive impact on mental health.

While research is premature and a causal link is yet to be determined, it's reasonable to suggest that social media may contribute to increased feelings of depression. When users are scrolling through their social media feeds and see their friends living, what seems to be, the perfect life with the perfect appearances and perfect friends, feelings of envy and isolation can often follow.



Results of technology addiction

News stories and other tragedies conveyed online are also contributing to emotional extremes. By consistently exposing us to horrific stories framed in targeted ways, users often begin to experience psychological reactions that don't actually resonate with their own life or values. What's even more concerning is that these reactions often begin to simulate the emotions of someone who had physically experienced a traumatic event, opening users up to a range of unnecessary and damaging emotions.

Young people with a technology dependence may also find that they struggle with a future in the workforce. As is reasonable in contemporary society, most employers enforce strict phone and search policies when at work. If technology has become so ingrained in a person's life that they are unable to separate themselves during work time, they may find themselves struggling to maintain employment.



Combating technology addiction

Technology addiction isn't something that sufferers can simply snap out of. Especially for kids and teens, it's important to understand that retraining their behaviours and the way they think about technology can take time and may even require professional intervention.

In the early stages, we should focus our efforts around educating those with unhealthy usage patterns about the effect of their behaviours on their health and wellbeing. In addition, getting them to understand why apps and platforms are designed the way that they are, and how business use this to make a profit, is also vital. It's also critically important to impart some perspective on our kids. They know only what they see online, so being able to provide another perspective to fill in the remaining picture is crucial in being able to teach our kids to make better and more informed decisions.

In good news, both Apple & Google have started acknowledging the parts they play in tech addiction and have begun launching new features to help users monitor and minimise their usage. While each device offers slightly different functions, in general you can now utilise the following features to aid the fight against tech addiction:

- + Do not disturb function that allows users to set time limits for blocking notifications
- + Grouped notifications to allow users to easily dismiss multiple messages
- + Access to weekly reports of how much time you spend on your device
- + Set time limits for how long you can use an app - allowing parents to manage usage
- + Wind down mode to block out blue light at bed time (which is known to inhibit sleep)

Some tips

As with many behaviours, teens tend to emulate what they see from their closest family members and friends. Although as adults we may need to use our devices for work, organise our lives and use our downtime to connect with friends, it's important that we set an example and set our phones down during family time. Here are a few ideas that might help your family.

Invest in a fruit bowl or container and set a device-free block of time in your house each night i.e dinner time. Each person in the house must place their phones on silent or turn them off and place them in the bowl, which will then sit in another room. If you can repeat this at bedtime so that you know your teen is getting rest rather than flipping through Instagram, then that is a huge step forward.

Sit with your teen while they scroll through their feed and converse with them about the content they're exposed to. Try and reserve any judgment, merely explain how the advertising and targeting works and talk about the people who seem to be living idyllic lifestyles on social media and what their reality might be.

Disable notifications. By simply taking the time to disable the banners, sounds, buzzes and badges that appear for a single notification, it removes that addictive response where someone might feel overwhelmingly compelled to check what the notification was for. Your teen will still see their notifications when they eventually open the app but disabling the alerts is a great way to remove that constant tapping at the window that devices are programmed to deliver – similar to the sounds you hear a pokie machine make.



Tackling tech addiction with Veteran Mentors

Our 9-day leadership programs for teens are designed to instil lessons of respect, resilience, teamwork and courage. As one of the most prolific issues currently facing our youth, we're also highly dedicated to helping kids step away from their screens and out into the real world.

Through giving them a 9-day digital detox, we can help your child break away from the grips of technology and remind them how to experience joy in more positive ways. We also help them in developing the ability to see beyond immediate challenges to reach greater outcomes - primarily, the struggle of putting down their mobile.

While our programs have assisted with a range of issues like lack of respect, low self-esteem or lack of motivation, almost all of our participants have demonstrated some level of technology addiction. Participants are therefore encouraged to build stronger relationships, become accountable for their actions and essentially reach their full potential away from the distractions associated with technology.

If this sounds like your child or someone you know and you're interested in learning more about the Junior Leadership Program, download our information pack below.

[Download Info Pack](#)





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