

Does my Child have a Screen or Tech Addiction Problem?

**Signs to look for:**

- Is your child staying up later and later to stay on the computer?
- Does your child get fidgety, anxious and/or angry if they don't have their device?
- Is their tech usage negatively impacting their schoolwork, family life or other activities or interests?
- Is your child indicating that he or she has a difficult time getting virtual imagery out of their heads?
- Is your child dreaming of virtual imagery?
- Is your child hiding their screen usage or hiding their devices from you?
- Does your child seem to be having a more difficult time regulating their emotions (also known as emotional dysregulation)?
- Does your child seem more apathetic and bored more easily?
- Does your child seem perpetually tired yet also wired ("wired and tired")?
- Are teachers complaining that your child is falling asleep in school?

Any one or combination of symptoms or behaviors from the above list could be a red flag for screen or tech addiction. Talk to your child and encourage a healthy dialogue about both their screen usage and about your concerns. I have found it effective to show kids the research about negative clinical and neurological effects of excessive screen exposure. If things get worse, reach out for professional help with therapists trained in screen addiction.

**Before going the route of the digital detox, you might want to consider these strategies:**

- If you've decided that your child needs to have a phone, then get them a flip phone instead of a "mini computer" smartphone.
- Substitute gaming time with family time; this can include cooking together, playing board games, gardening, listening to music or taking a family walk or bike ride together.
- Require your child to do a physical activity (chore, exercise, etc.) for the same amount of time that they were online. Create that expectation: i.e., one hour online is an hour of yard work.

Let your kids be bored! This is when creativity occurs, and your kids can find their talents.

Source: Kardaras, Nicholas, Ph.D., *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction is Hijacking our Kids – And How to Break the Trance*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016.