

## More Advice on Teen Smartphone Use

“Due to the constant temptation to check their smartphones, today’s students are spending less time on their schoolwork, taking longer to complete assignments, and feeling more stressed in the process,” says Larry Rosen (California State University/Dominguez Hills) in this *Kappan* article. Have we reached the saturation point? “Sadly, I don’t think we are there yet,” says Rosen. “The smartphone is still only 10 years old, and many of us are still falling deeper into our obsessive relationship with these devices.” Some data from recent studies:

- College students unlock their phones at least every 15 minutes, look at them about five minutes each time, and spend a total of 4½ hours a day glued to their devices.
- Online conversations are teens’ lifeblood, accounting for much, if not most, of their social lives.
- Teens are constantly multitasking, even though they know it’s not efficient.
- When teens have their phones taken away, they become highly anxious.
- Phone-related anxiety is closely linked to poor academic performance and sleep deprivation.
- About 80 percent of teens say they rarely if ever sleep well, usually because they have a smartphone at their bedside and check it before going to sleep and during the night.
- The average adolescent finds it difficult to study for 15 minutes at a time.
- During a 15-minute stint of studying, teens spend at least five minutes in a state of distraction.
- 80 percent of high-school teachers and 63 percent of elementary teachers say technology is making students less able to sustain attention.
- Office workers are interrupted (or interrupt themselves) every 3-5 minutes, take as much as 20 minutes to get back to work, and feel stressed by having to work faster to make up for the lost time.

Rosen has these suggestions for messages that educators and parents should be giving kids:

- *Your brain needs an occasional “reset.”* Elementary-age children should spend no more than a half hour at a time on a device, followed by a break at least that long. Preteens and adolescents should spend no more than 90 minutes at a time with technology, followed by at least 10-15 minutes on an activity that calms their brain – going outside, exercising, listening to music, meditating, taking a shower, having an in-person conversation with a friend, playing a musical instrument, practicing a foreign language.

- *Build stamina for studying without technology.* Treat this like any kind of strength training, says Rosen: start off easy and gradually increase the amount of time

without a tech break. He suggests 15 minutes at first, turning off all websites and apps that aren't relevant to the study topic, setting an alarm, and placing the phone within sight, face down. When the alarm goes off, the student can check for messages and notifications for a minute, then set another 15-minute alarm. When the student can tolerate 15 minutes, perhaps finishing a paragraph when the alarm goes off rather than immediately grabbing the phone, push the time to 20 minutes, then 25, and so on. During this strength-building sequence, it's helpful for the teen to notify friends that there might not be an instant response to messages so they don't keep texting.

- *Sleep is sacred.* Nine hours is the recommended amount for high-school students, and kids should know that melatonin is naturally secreted in the hours before bedtime to produce sleepiness – unless they're peering at a blue-light device. Ways to keep the melatonin pumping: use a pink-light setting in the hour before bedtime, or listen to familiar music or TV shows, read a paper book, and ramp down mental effort.

- *Cut down on the number of alerts and notifications.* It may not occur to teens that they can de-activate apps that aren't of strong interest, cutting down on distracting notifications. Rosen says he's amazed at the number of apps he uses each day, often without even thinking.

- *Carve out tech-free zones.* These might include the dinner table, restaurant meals, the car, the family den, and the bedroom. During the day, teens might need occasional one-minute breaks to check their phones and keep FOMO (fear of missing out) under control.

“The Distracted Student Mind: Enhancing Its Focus and Attention” by Larry Rosen in *Phi Delta Kappan*, October 2017 (Vol. 99, #2, p. 8-14), [www.kappanmagazine.org](http://www.kappanmagazine.org); Rosen can be reached at [rosen@csudh.edu](mailto:rosen@csudh.edu).