



If you isolate any issue, you will see that learning the right way to communicate with the person or people you are in disagreement with is the best approach. Not always the easiest or least exhausting, but usually the most productive and healthy. The problems which arise when a family member(s) rely on screens too much is no different.

One of the workshops I offer called “Tired of Being Tired: The Truth About Sleep” connects the link between mobile usage and impaired quality of sleep. A common concern which is brought up from the audience is the amount of screen time their child/teenager use at home. It is a common stress point for many parents and interestingly enough it is a common stress point for many adolescents. Hence, I decided to create this resource which incorporates themes noticed from working with both the adolescent and adult population. Below are some approaches you may consider trying:

1. *Ask “why”* - Instead of automatically going into the reasons s/he should not be on their mobile device as much as they are, surprise them! Sit next to them, or crawl up beside them in bed and explore what is it about being on their device they enjoy so much. When I ask any of my adolescent clients this as a Psychotherapist sometimes there is a blank stare of confusion that I am even interested in their “why”, however, you might be surprised of the reasons they share.
2. *Insert Imagination*- Explore with them how life would flow in their minds, if they did not have a mobile device. For those who cannot access the answer for #1 above (reason they desire it), this line of questioning may help them reflect and figure out their “why”.
3. *Flip it to “We”*- Make this issue a family or parent-child issue, not just an issue with them. This decreases the feeling of them being blamed or the “bad person”. They may be more responsive.
4. *Compare Existing Rules/Expectations*- Notice patterns of the rules already existing in the household. For example, if you have a curfew or a rule of how long their room can remain untidy until their will be unwanted consequences then use those as examples of how structure is needed when groups are trying to co-exist and remain connected with each other. Then allow them to suggest rules surrounding mobile usage for everyone in the house with the understanding that it does not mean they will be implemented (i.e. no usage area, time limitations etc.). Then together modify and explain any needed adjustments.

5. *Rule out underlying mental health*- At times there could be underlying emotional and mental health issues which contribute to over-usage of mobile devices. Making sure to connect the dots and make the conversation about good mental health as natural as possible. If your child is not opening up, accept this is how it is for now. Try not to take it personally and encourage them to speak to another family member, family friend, church member, coach, teacher and/or health professional.
6. *Highlight the Family Values*- The importance of knowing your values and aligning self-care strategies to these values is a message I emphasize often. I believe the same is true in this situation. The values that exist within the family unit, no matter what type of family unit, is an important aspect of the situation which I invite you to explore with your child/adolescent. Once there is an agreement on these values then demonstrating or highlighting how using a mobile device compliments these values “is the key”. However, you actually modeling what is expected through your actions allows your young one to witness that you are serious. And demonstrating this action point is how “the key turns”.
7. *Reinforce that you did not make this stuff up!* - If your child/adolescent doubts that your concerns are valid then this is where research, statistics and evidence may be valuable. Find various research articles which could support your position (Please notice I did not say support your argument as this is **not** the mindset you should have, if you want to reach a reasonable solution). When sharing **remember how surprised you were learning some of the facts** and share with them how surprised you were when you learned about this to emphasis it is new learning for all of you (it is just that we all learn this information at different times). Nobody likes to be shown they were wrong, so regardless of how frustrated you may be feeling try to be compassionate.
8. *Connect to your source of frustration*- Practice your own self-care so you can remain grounded, clear, appropriately responsive and compassionate during these difficult conversations with your family member(s). As yourself if it is the feeling of not being in control, is it that you miss spending time with them, does it stem from fear that you are unsure what they are actually doing when on the device? Be clear. This is a trend that’s not going away, so a sustainable plan involves checking-in to see if it is working, being honest when someone “slips-up” so it can be a learning point, be gentle with yourself if you end up yelling in frustration or act “irrational”. Remember you are allowed to make mistakes; it is all part of the parenting world.

Other Resources You May Find Helpful

1. MediaSmarts, a Canadian non-profit organization - that focuses on media literacy.
2. <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addictions/smartphone-addiction.htm>
3. <https://www.helpyourteens.com/teens-use-burner-phones-to-hide-online-behavior-from-parents/>
4. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/child-development-central/202001/teen-phone-use-101>