

## Middle School Guidance Officer Article

### We Finally Started Taking Screen Time Seriously in 2018



At the beginning of this year, I was using my iPhone to browse new titles on Amazon when I saw the cover of “How to Break up with Your Phone” by Catherine Price. I downloaded it on Kindle because I genuinely wanted to reduce my smartphone use, but also because I thought it would be hilarious to read a book about breaking up with your smartphone on my smartphone. Within a couple of chapters, however, I was motivated enough to download Moment, a screen-time-tracking app recommended by Price, and re-purchase the book in print.

Early in “How to Break Up With Your Phone,” Price invites her readers to take the Smartphone Compulsion Test, developed by David Greenfield, a psychiatry professor at the University of Connecticut who also founded the Centre for Internet and Technology Addiction. The test has 15 questions, but I knew I was in trouble after answering the first five. Humbled by my very high score, which I am too embarrassed to disclose, I decided it was time to get serious about curtailing my smartphone usage.

Of the chapters in Price's book, the one called “Putting the Dope in Dopamine” resonated with me the most. She writes that “phones and most apps are deliberately designed without ‘stopping cues’ to alert us when we’ve had enough—which is why it’s so easy to accidentally binge. On a certain level, we know that what we’re doing is making us feel gross. But instead of stopping, our brains decide the solution is to seek out more dopamine. We check our phones again. And again. And again.”

#### The growing mound of research

Then in November, researchers at Penn State released an important new study that linked social media usage by adolescents to depression. Led by psychologist Melissa Hunt, the experimental study monitored 143 students with iPhones from the university for three weeks. The undergraduates were divided into two groups: one was instructed to limit their time on social media, including Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram, to just 10 minutes each app per day (their usage was confirmed by checking their phone’s iOS battery use screens). The other group continued using social media apps as they usually did. At the beginning of the study, a baseline was established with standard tests for depression, anxiety, social support and other issues, and each group continued to be assessed throughout the experiment.

The findings, published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, were striking. The researchers wrote that “the limited use group showed significant reductions in loneliness and depression over three weeks compared to the control group.” Even the control group benefited, despite not being given limits on their social media use. “Both groups showed significant decreases in anxiety and fear of missing out over baselines, suggesting a benefit of increased self-monitoring,” the study said. “Our findings strongly suggest that limiting social media use to approximately 30 minutes a day may lead to significant improvement in well-being.”

Other academic studies published this year added to the growing roster of evidence that smartphones and mobile apps can significantly harm your mental and physical well-being.

A group of researchers from Princeton, Dartmouth, the University of Texas at Austin, and Stanford published a study in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* that found using smartphones to take photos and videos of an experience actually reduces the ability to form memories of it. Others warned against keeping smartphones in your bedroom or even on your desk while you work. Optical chemistry researchers at the University of Toledo found that blue light from digital devices can cause molecular changes in your retina, potentially speeding macular degeneration.

So over the past 12 months, I've certainly had plenty of motivation to reduce my screen time. In fact, every time I checked the news on my phone, there seemed to be yet another headline about the perils of smartphone use. I began using *Moment* to track my total screen time and how it was divided between apps. I took two of *Moment's* in-app courses, "*Phone Bootcamp*" and "*Bored and Brilliant*." I also used the app to set a daily time limit, turned on "*tiny reminders*," or push notifications that tell you how much time you've spent on your phone so far throughout the day, and enabled the "*Force Me Off When I'm Over*" feature, which basically annoys you off your phone when you go over your daily allotment.

Read more: [We Finally Started Taking Screen Time Seriously in 2018](#) Catherine Shu, TechCrunch

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