

**Gen Z: The Zombie Generation**

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“But why can’t I have a phone? All of my friends have one!” This is a question that so many parents receive on a daily basis from their desperate teens. I myself was once guilty of asking this same question. There is so much pressure on today’s parents to live up to their child’s standards. But, how do you know if they’re ready? At what age is it appropriate for your child to have a phone of their own? What will the effects be when they get one? Writer for *LifeHack*, Casey Imafidon (2017), attempts to break down these complex questions in his article, “*Ten reasons you shouldn’t hand a smart phone to your children.*” He states, “As a parent, you ought to be concerned about the impact that devices such as smartphones can have on your child.” Throughout his article he lists the negative side effects of these devices and their particular outcomes. His point throughout the article is how smartphones have shown to jeopardize “the child’s overall development.” He claims that smartphone can effect relationships, mental well-being, physical well-being, and can, in most cases, create a serious addiction. Not for just children, but for all of us. I believe his points are valid, and most are quite concerning. But, could a middle ground be met? Could parents manage their child’s screen time better, possibly making giving their child a cell phone more manageable? The average teen has unlimited access to anything on the internet you could possibly imagine by age fourteen. This is of course without any adult supervision. Cassy Imafidon (2017) covers a lot of things we all need to be aware of when it comes to our phones and brings awareness to their dangerous side effects. But, in the end, he fails to point out what parents could be doing differently when it comes to protecting their children against the harmful effects of social media.

To start off his article, Imafidon (2017) writes that smartphones “alter the bonding that is supposed to exist between a parent and child.” He argues that the distance that technology is putting between a parent and child isn’t natural and is doing more harm than good for their future relationships with family. He states, “Children are still passing through a period of growth, and you need to establish your relationship with them.” I couldn’t agree more. I believe that there should be more stress on this particular topic because, in the end, your family is all you have. And parents need to take this time to establish and maintain a strong bond with their children, before it’s too late. It’s not just relationships with parents that teens are missing out on, its relationships in general. Rachel Ehmke (2023), Writer for the *Child Mind Institute* states that, “If kids aren’t getting enough practice relating to people and getting their needs met in person and in real time, many of them will grow up to be adults who are anxious about our species’ primary means of communication—talking.”

In addition, Imafidon (2017) also argues that smartphones have shown to have very severe effects of a teenager’s mental health. He states, “Amongst the causes of depression and anorexia in kids is the use of the smartphone and connection to the internet. Since through it kids are bullied and often unsupervised, there is a negative impact on their mental health.” He also argues that smartphones are linked to behavioral and attention problems. He also states that smartphone and internet access desensitizes a child’s mind to violent behavior. Imafidon (2017) “Through the smartphone, kids are exposed to violence in games and through cyberbullying on chat sites. This desensitizes children and prompts them to accept that violent behavior is simply a normal way to solve problems.” I believe this is a devastating truth. I have seen people in my own life (especially teens), fall victim to all of these mind games that social media plays on our self-perspective, and change our idea of what we think is acceptable until it’s something we

don't even recognize. The *National Library of Medicine* (2020) writes, "The proportion of teenagers reporting moderate to serious mental distress increased from 24% in 2013, to 34% in 2015 and to 39% in 2017, with parallel increases in health service utilization. Inpatient hospital admissions of children and adolescents for mental health reasons increased substantially." Social media can seem harmless at first glance, but the effects that it has shown to have on a child's mental health is everything but harmless. Social media causes everyone to set unrealistic examples for themselves, because of the examples of "normal" they see on the internet.

Furthermore, Imafidon (2017) is also very concerned about the effects technology is having on a child's physical health. He writes, "Too much time spent on smartphones also affects the physical health of your kids. With a smartphone, your child is subjected to remaining at a particular spot for hours. Such technology overuse is now a factor causing obesity." According to the *Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health*, a child with an average on five plus hours of screen time per day is "43% more likely to be obese—compared with teens who spent less time using their screened devices." Imafidon (2017) also argues that smartphones are causing kids to get "significantly less sleep" than they usually would if they didn't have their smartphones in their bedroom at night. Pediatrician Dr. Cindy Gellner (2017) says, "Kids between the ages of 6 and 19, 41% who had their mobile device in the bedroom didn't sleep enough hours. Forty-five percent of children who used their electronic device before sleeping had the highest percentage of reduced sleep hours." I believe that Imafidon (2017) does not stress this issue enough. He brings awareness to this issue, but in the end, he fails to explain the consequences of this sleep disruption and deprivation. Michael J. Breus Ph.D. (2015) says, "There is research that indicates RF EMF (radiofrequency electromagnetic fields) exposure may lead to changes in waking cognitive performance. The observable cognitive changes in studies

include reduced reaction speed, increased accuracy of working memory, and diminished performance on motor tasks.” The high consecrations of blue light being emitted from our smartphones, has shown to effect the melatonin production in our brains, this of course, primarily effects young people because they are the primary users of technology.

In conclusion to his article, Imafidon (2017) states that smartphones can create a very serious addiction. “A smartphone could become a source for an addiction. This kind of addiction engages their minds and captivates them for a long time, even to adulthood.” He goes on to say that this addiction can “jeopardize a child’s overall development” because if they are always on their smartphones, they are missing out on all kinds of real life growing opportunities. I believe that this is another devastating truth. In fact, this “addiction” is a major problem in our society today. And this addiction isn’t just found in teens, it is found in adults. Katie Hueley, LCSW.

Writer for *Psycom* argues:

“Parents have reason to worry. Results of a 2016 Common Sense Media Report found that 50% of teens ‘feel addicted’ to mobile devices, while 59% of parents surveyed believed that kids are addicted to their devices. This survey also showed that 72% of teens and 48% of parents felt the need to immediately respond to texts, social-networking messages, and other notifications; 69% of parents and 78% of teens checked their devices at least hourly.” (para. 4).

This addiction is not to be taken lightly, it can affect all aspects of a child’s life. Because once somebody is addicted to something they will give up anything in favor of the particular thing they are addicted to. Even if it means not getting their homework done, not getting enough sleep, giving up on important relationships, or even giving up their safety as a result of not being in tune with their surroundings.

I'm sure we are all somewhat aware of these things, but we should start worrying now before it's too late, because technology isn't just effecting us, its effecting our kids. Next time your child asks for a smartphone, don't think about what they want, think about what's best for them.

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