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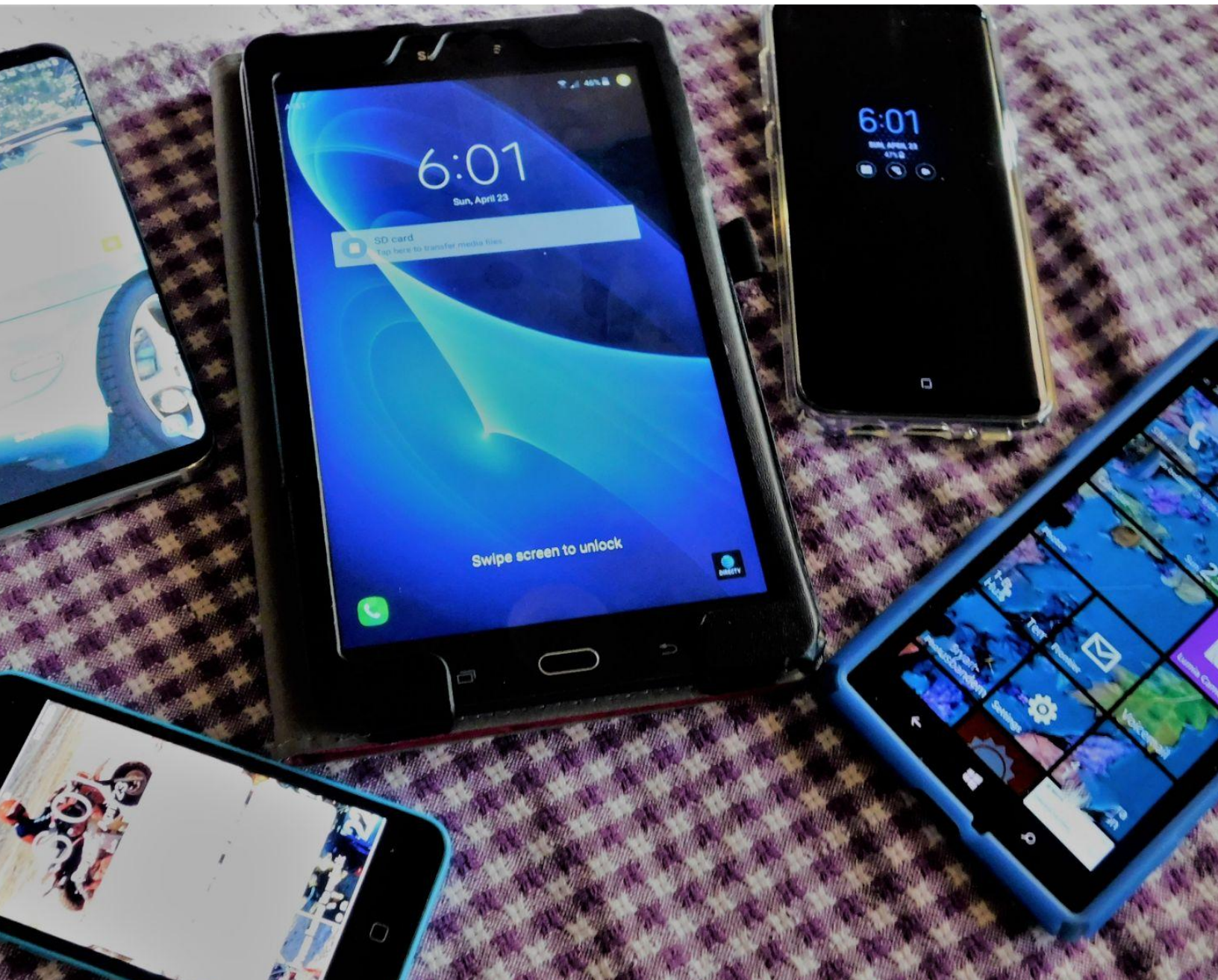**Presents:**

Screens and Teens

An Electronics Safety Guide for Parents

Hello Summer!

As we advance into a more connected world, it is crucial for parents to understand the importance of electronic safety for their kids. With devices such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops, there is an endless amount of content online for teens to be glued to: online games, watching videos, surfing the web, and interacting with others. It is important for parents to understand the effects of screen time on their kids' behavior, learning, and mental health, all while giving them the resources to make them feel independent in their use of electronics, but not alone.

Psychology Behind Electronic Devices

- In an article written by PandaSecurity.com, 10 years old is the average age a child receives their first cell phone, and nearly ¼ of kids receive some sort of electronic device by the age of 6.

- Electronic devices are designed to keep kids glued to the screen. It is no secret that teens have a complicated relationship with mobile devices. They are expected to use technology both in and out of the classroom, manage their social lives through various apps and social media platforms, and use technology to stay organized with their many activities.

- These devices not only limit the amount of hours teens sleep, or spend outside with family and friends, but also affect the way their brain develops. Decades of research show that face-to-face interactions are important for cognitive, language and most importantly, emotional development.

Effects on Teen Sleep Cycles

Bedrooms should be primarily associated with sleep, but they are also a study space, a movie theatre and even a game room.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, when it becomes dark, the body produces a hormone called melatonin that induces sleepiness. The sleep-wake cycle follows a circadian rhythm. When it's bright outside we become more alert. Smartphones, tablets, computers and other electronic devices give off short-wavelength blue light that is very similar to sunlight. Not only does this light make us more alert, it also deceives the body into thinking it's still daytime.

When teens are on their electronic devices before bed, this can disrupt their sleep schedule and bedtime routine.

Effects on Teen Education

The more time students use electronic devices to surf the web, play games, and interact on social media, the less time they spend developing other educational skills such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing. One study conducted by the National Institute of Health found that children who spent over two hours a day on their screens received lower scores on language and critical thinking tests (www.nih.gov).
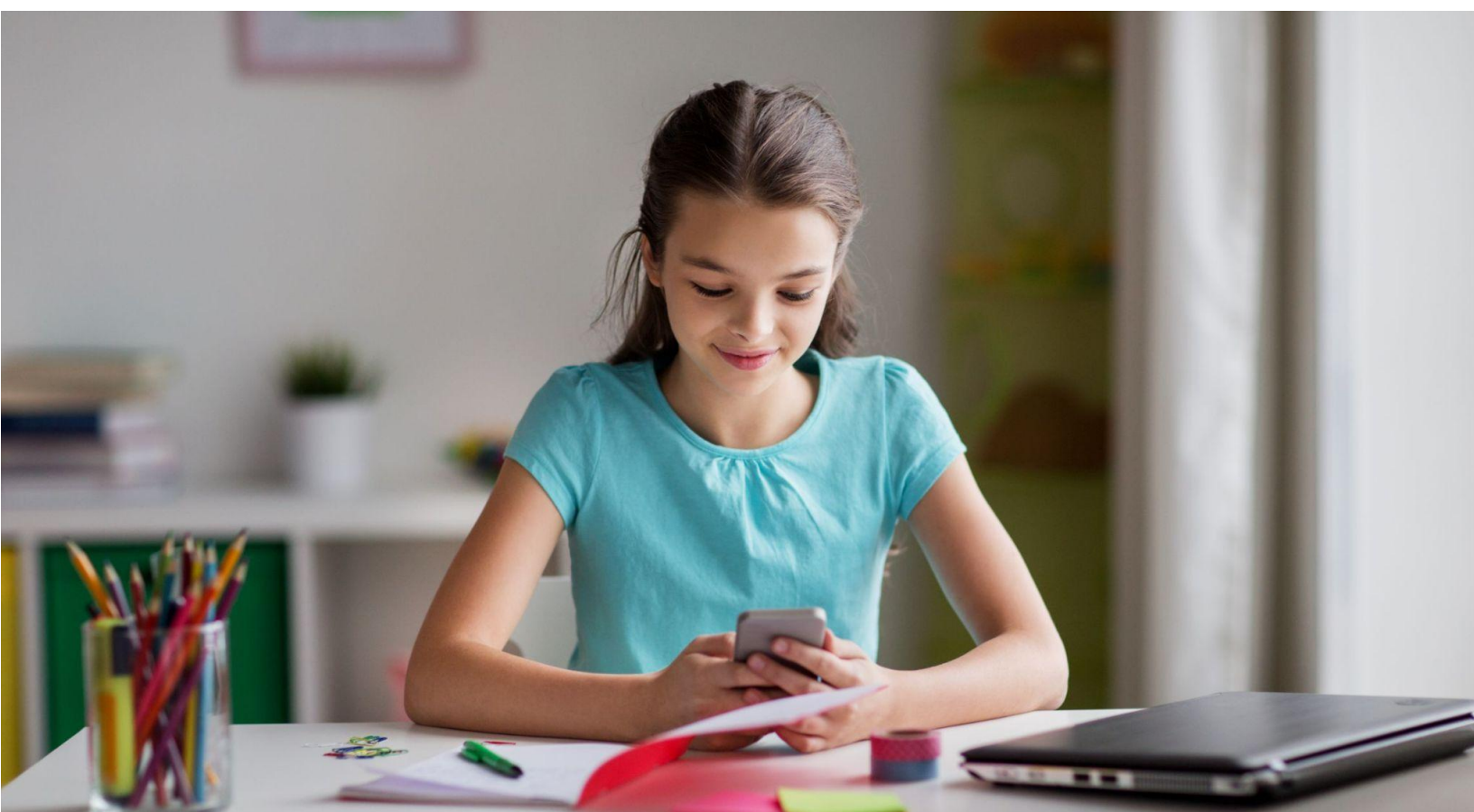
Effects on Teen Mental Health

Studies about mental health show that teens who use electronic devices excessively can be overstimulated by screen time, without realizing it. This overuse may cause worsening moods, depression and anxiety, higher levels of irritability, and limited physical activity resulting in obesity. According to the National Institute of Health, excessive use of electronics is more likely to result in a diagnosis of anxiety or depression. 14 to 17-year-olds spending 7 or more hours per day with screens were more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression or anxiety. (www.nih.gov)

S.C.R.E.E.N.S.A.V.E.R.S

for Parents

Set boundaries and time limits for electronic device usage.

Create a routine schedule with homework and activities apart from recreational use of electronics.

Reinforce alternative activities such as hobbies, board games and outdoor fun.

Establish electronic-free times in your home, such as during dinner and bedtime.

Exercise use of parental control features if needed.

Notice changes in your teen's behavior or moods.

Stay consistent with rules and boundaries.

Allow your teen to help create the boundaries.

Value quality time with family such as game nights, and introducing new activities.

Educate your kids on the effects of overuse of electronic devices.

Reinforce the boundaries and limits by following the same rules.

Share these best practices with family and friends.

Having the Conversation

It is important to have a conversation with your teenagers about the ways in which too much screen time can harm their cognitive development. It is also important to emphasize quality time with family and friends outside of electronics. If you feel as though your teenager is looking toward the Internet for emotional support or being bullied, engage with them, educate them on safe electronic usage, and empower them to make good decisions online and come to you when they need help.

Resources

- [Home Report Cyberbullying](#)
- [When Should Kids Get Smartphones](#)
- [Smart Social - Digital Citizenship](#)
- [Limit Screen Time](#)
- [Associations Between Screen Time and Lower Psychological Well-being](#)
- [How Screen Time May Cause Insomnia in Teens](#)
- [High Amounts of Screen Time Begin as Early as Infancy](#)

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Parents With Preparedness Magazine

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