It can be challenging for parents and carers to know whether children are spending too much time on their devices. Furthermore, it’s even more of a challenge to know whether a child is addicted to the internet and social media. As technology is becoming more pervasive, children and young people are experiencing tech-related dependencies. Do we as parents and carers have the knowledge to identify and support children and young people who may be developing an addiction to their devices?

**Top Tips for Parents**

**LIMIT SCREEN TIME**

In today’s digital age, technology is an important part of a child’s development so completely banning them from their devices will mean they are missing out on a lot, including conversations and communication with their friends. Rather than banning them from using their devices, we suggest setting a screen time limit. Work out how much time you think is a healthy amount of time for your child to be on their device per week. Remember that your children may need to use devices for their school homework so only set screen limits on recreational time on their device. Once you have established this, have a conversation with them to discuss why you are implementing a screen limit. There will be others in your child’s friendship group who will not have screen time limits set and will be sending messages when they do not have access to their phones.

**LEAD BY EXAMPLE**

Children model their behavior on their peers, so if their parents are constantly on their device, they will see this as acceptable. Try limiting your own screen time and follow the same rules you have set for them. If you have asked your child to not use their device at the table, make sure you don’t. Try setting house rules that the whole family abide by.

**LESS TIME MEANS LESS EXPOSURE**

There are many risks associated with devices, such as cyberbullying, grooming, sexting, viewing inappropriate content etc. Less time spent on a screen means that a child will be less exposed to these risks.

**ENCOURAGE ALTERNATE ACTIVITIES**

It may seem like an obvious solution, but encouraging children to play with their friends, read a book or playing outdoors will help them realise they can have fun without their device. Playing football, trampolining, camping, going for a walk or swimming are all healthy replacements for screen time. Try to join them in their Outdoor activities to show your support.

**MOBILE-FREE MEAL TIMES**

Have you tried to set your child by giving them a tablet at the dinner table or restaurant? This may seem like a quick fix to calm them down but in reality, it is encouraging them to use their device as a distraction from conversation and dealing with their emotions. We suggest removing all technology from the dinner table and having conversations with your family about how their day has been.

**REMOVE DEVICES FROM THEIR BEDROOM**

Setting a rule about removing devices from bedrooms will help your child to get the sleep they need and be more focussed the next day at school. 99% of children aged 12–15 said they thought their children spent too much time in front of screens. As the Children’s Commissioner report ‘Life in Lens: explored how children aged 8–11 are using social media today. It showed that children are using their devices to speak to their online friends about their problems and seek acceptance and support, removing face to face interactions.

**APPS CAN BE ADDICTIVE**

Apps have been designed with ‘psychological tricks’ to constantly keep grabbing your attention. One example of this is on the app ‘Snapchat, where you can gain ‘streaks’ when interacting with your friends. If you don’t respond, you lose the streak. This addictive nature of apps aims to engage children and keep them coming back for more.

**SOURCES**

http://www.independent.co.uk, ‘Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2018’

http://uk.businessinsider.com/how-app-developers-keep-us-addicted-to-our-smartphones

Journal of Youth Studies: ‘Smartphone rehab’ following growing concerns over screen time. There are now help centers in the UK which deal with ‘screen addiction’ for children and adults showing the seriousness of device addiction. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has officially recognised gaming addiction as a modern disease. The condition was confirmed as part of their International Classification of Diseases (ICD) which serves as an international standard for diagnosing and treating health conditions.

**LIMIT SCREEN TIME**

In today’s digital age, technology is an important part of a child’s development so completely banning them from their device will mean they are missing out on a lot, including conversations and communication with their friends. Rather than banning them from using their devices, we suggest setting a screen time limit. Work out what you think is a suitable and healthy amount of time for your child to be on their device per week. Remember that your child may need to use devices for their school homework so only set screen limits on recreational time on their device. Once you have established this, have a conversation with them to discuss why you are implementing a screen time limit. There will be others in your child’s friendship group who will not have screen time limits set and will be sending messages when they do not have access to their phones.

**LEAD BY EXAMPLE**

Children model their behavior on their peers, so if their parents are constantly on their device, they will see this as acceptable. Try limiting your own screen time and follow the same rules you have set for them. If you have asked your child to not use their device at the table, make sure you don’t. Try setting house rules that the whole family abide by.

**LESS TIME MEANS LESS EXPOSURE**

There are many risks associated with devices, such as cyberbullying, grooming, sexting, viewing inappropriate content etc. Less time spent on a screen means that a child will be less exposed to these risks.

**ENCOURAGE ALTERNATE ACTIVITIES**

It may seem like an obvious solution, but encouraging children to play with their friends, read a book or playing outdoors will help them realise they can have fun without their device. Playing football, trampolining, camping, going for a walk or swimming are all healthy replacements for screen time. Try to join them in their Outdoor activities to show your support.

**MOBILE-FREE MEAL TIMES**

Have you tried to set your child by giving them a tablet at the dinner table or restaurant? This may seem like a quick fix to calm them down but in reality, it is encouraging them to use their device as a distraction from conversation and dealing with their emotions. We suggest removing all technology from the dinner table and having conversations with your family about how their day has been.

**REMOVE DEVICES FROM THEIR BEDROOM**

Setting a rule about removing devices from bedrooms will help your child to get the sleep they need and be more focussed the next day at school. 99% of children aged 12–15 said they thought their children spent too much time in front of screens. As the Children’s Commissioner report ‘Life in Lens: explored how children aged 8–11 are using social media today. It showed that children are using their devices to speak to their online friends about their problems and seek acceptance and support, removing face to face interactions.

**APPS CAN BE ADDICTIVE**

Apps have been designed with ‘psychological tricks’ to constantly keep grabbing your attention. One example of this is on the app ‘Snapchat, where you can gain ‘streaks’ when interacting with your friends. If you don’t respond, you lose the streak. This addictive nature of apps aims to engage children and keep them coming back for more.

**SOURCES**

http://www.independent.co.uk, ‘Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2018’

http://uk.businessinsider.com/how-app-developers-keep-us-addicted-to-our-smartphones

Journal of Youth Studies: ‘Smartphone rehab’ following growing concerns over screen time. There are now help centers in the UK which deal with ‘screen addiction’ for children and adults showing the seriousness of device addiction. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has officially recognised gaming addiction as a modern disease. The condition was confirmed as part of their International Classification of Diseases (ICD) which serves as an international standard for diagnosing and treating health conditions.