

Phone Withdrawal Guidance for Adults

Many young people use their phones to keep in touch with friends, use social media, find information and use educational apps or games. Phones can be an incredibly useful tool, offering access to the wider world and knowledge. However, overuse or an impulse to constantly check or use a phone can be detrimental to young people.

Constantly checking a phone can cause side-effects such as:

- irritability;
- changes in sleep pattern;
- changes in appetite;
- changes in real-life relationships;
- changes in concentration.



Young people may choose to have relationships online because these relationships often exist in a 'bubble' where real-life emotions aren't as strong and the feelings are not as uncomfortable. However, online relationships don't provide people with the same social cues, depth of emotions or behaviours. The time spent in online relationships can often prevent real-life ones being developed.

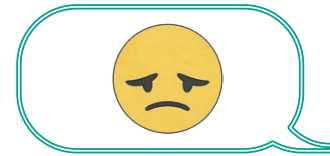
Spending time online seeking information and being reactive to online communication can also have a detrimental effect on young people. They may experience lower productivity due to being easily distracted and finding it hard to concentrate on specific tasks. The impulse to check a phone can take priority in young people's minds over whatever they should be focusing on at the time.

Taking some time away from phones can help young people to create a balance between the virtual and the real world. However, young people can find phone withdrawal difficult at first and they may not understand the need to do this.

Sharing information about the effects of the overuse of phones with young people may help them understand the need to limit time on their phone. You might discuss finding sleep difficult after using phones during the evening, finding it hard to concentrate or maybe being less empathetic to others.

Young people can have uncomfortable feelings when they see other people on social media. Sometimes, these uncomfortable feelings come from comparing themselves unfavourably to other young people online. It can help to try and see the reality of these situations and people in real life and remind the young people that what they see online is often someone's highlight reel. The images they are looking at have been curated and posed for and may have been altered using filters. Filters can be used to change how something looks, including a person's physical appearance.

Young people may also be exposed to unreliable or untrue information known as 'fake news'. Understanding that this is the case and not believing everything they see or read can be difficult when young people are constantly bombarded with this information. This can cause anxious thoughts. Supporting young people to gain a true perspective of the world can help them to understand what is true and what isn't.



Often, young people see adults using their phones to check their messages, social media and emails or to game. A great way to support young people is to model good phone usage yourself. You could do this by showing them that you can limit time on your phone by using phone limiting apps or phone alarms, putting phones away at mealtimes or other times to have a real-life conversation with eye contact. When young people see adults using phones responsibly and with healthy limits, they can see the positive impact on their overall health and wellbeing. This can motivate them to do this for themselves.

There are many other ways young people can be supported to limit their phone usage and overcome the impulsive need to check them.



Here are some ideas:

- Help young people to record the times when they use their phone, thinking about what they use it for and how they feel afterwards.
- Identify triggers that might make people pick up their phones, such as boredom or fear of missing out (FOMO).
- Encourage young people to do something tangible like reading a book, playing sport, exercising, getting fresh air, playing a board game or learning a new skill.
- Encourage young people to use their phone in a shared space so their phone usage can be monitored and they can feel less isolated.
- Keep young people's bedrooms phone free.
- Encourage young people to turn their phones off at least two hours before they go to sleep to reduce the effects of blue light. Support them to find a new, relaxing activity to do that supports a healthy sleep routine.
- Support young people to try new things such as joining a new club, trying a new hobby, volunteering or doing something that helps someone else.
- Try reducing time spent on phones gradually, rather than stopping suddenly. This can help alleviate some of the withdrawal symptoms and give young people time to develop alternative behaviours.
- Support young people to develop time management strategies. Young people need to be encouraged to develop a balance of activities which includes allowing them to use their phone alongside doing schoolwork, socialising with friends and family, and after-school activities, sport or music.

Sharing information with young people about the impact of phone usage on their physical, mental and emotional health is often the key to engaging them to support themselves to actively withdraw from their phone and find a healthier balance of activities.

Young people may need further support or advice to effectively withdraw from their phones. If this is the case, encourage them to seek support from their trusted adults.

