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Teens and Technology: Growing Up in a Connected World

Looking back, I believe our parents were right. I remember begging my parents for a phone in middle school, wanting to be just like my other friends. Their hesitation, similar to many parents around the world, was an instinct that we all should have paid closer attention to. Although, researchers have been paying attention to this, analyzing each move we make. Each of which we are getting closer to our own demise. Shelley Turkle, a clinical psychologist and professor at MIT, effectively illustrates the truth about modern technology in her article *The Empathy Diaries*. She is known for her research on how the internet has negatively affected human behavior, especially in youth. Her ideas follow a similar trend in what the youth is recently discovering, that screens have actually impacted us in an unfavorable way. Peyton Perkins, a first year student at the University of New England, reflects upon the deep integration of technology into daily life, portraying it as both a convenience and a dependency in her article *Where Did We Go Wrong?* Similarly, Kaia Anderson who is also a first year student at the University of New England, argues that cooperation across generations to address technology addiction is greatly needed in her article *Helping the Addict: A Call To Action*. Each author offers insight shaped by their current stage in life. Being that Turkle published her article in 2021, which is not too far away from our current year, it's impactful to see how her prediction has become true. We are lost as a generation, needing guidance from our elders, as Anderson suggests, and most importantly, we need to reclaim our unique personalities by putting down our phones. The only way teenagers and adults alike can reclaim their identity in a meaningful way is to put down their phones.

The claim that social media has impacted us mentally due to overuse is absolutely correct, mostly because we not only can see it impacting others, but now ourselves more than ever. Turkle is sure to include her analysis of how young adults' mental health has been impacted. She says, "When personal

computers became online games, children experimented with identity by building avatars.” She then continues to say “Also constant was the anxiety of adults around children and machines... They watched, unhappy, as children became lost in games and forgot about the people around them, preferring, at long stretches, the world's in the machine.” (Turkle 345-346) In other words, the adult’s anxiety of children becoming lost in their new personalities online is unfortunate for both parties. There are misunderstandings and lack of knowledge all around. The parents' judgment is partially correct, but coming from a place of fear, which led to children being even more indifferent to their opinions. Parents were right to be concerned about children becoming consumed by games, a growing and troubling trend, because many of those children now struggle to find purpose or direction without them. Perkins continues this idea and provides insight from a college student's perspective. She conveys, “We are in a constant state of ‘where is my phone?’ Feeling uncomfortable in the elevator; check your phone. Nervous before an interview; check your phone. We want to access technology not necessarily because it is helpful, but because we have made it an extension of who we are” (Perkins). In other words, growing up surrounded by screens has affected us so deeply that functioning without them feels nearly impossible. It defines us, offers us comfort, and ultimately becomes a part of our identity. While some may not see it as a problem, this is a growing issue. Especially for those aiming to advance their careers, where the impact of screens on a person's professional development becomes increasingly apparent. Being unable to portray our unique selves without social media will not further us in our career or social goals. We need to reclaim our personalities.

As students, we can tell in the classrooms who the outliers are. The people who watch TikTok or play games on their phone instead of paying attention to the lecture, or those who lack communication skills during group projects really stand out. The amount of students who haven't learned viable skills in middle and high school, which are needed for college and our career goals, is growing exponentially. This is due to technology being let into classrooms. Anderson, a student, argues “The presence of technology has had negative effects on behavior, especially when it comes to attention span and engaging with others” (Anderson). Attention span is the real kicker. Short videos, such as TikTok or Instagram, makes

sitting through lectures and reading slides much more difficult for this generation. Anderson illustrates this perfectly in her article. It's very interesting to see the impacts Anderson describes, which are growing exactly how another author, Turkle, described they would be. In Turkle's writing she includes a distraught teacher who describes the new school setting, "It is a struggle to get children to talk to each other in class, to directly address each other. It is a struggle to get them to meet with faculty... These students seem to understand each other less" (Turkle 344). In a similar way of describing this predicament, students' lack of social skills only worsens as they continue to not practice it in school. Keep in mind this was from 2008. Personally I believe that it's the teachers job to push their students to talk and interact. If there are issues, fix them head on with the individual students. I think that teachers get nervous to put students in awkward situations, especially at a young age, but that's exactly what they need. Now I know many try over and over, and their frustration only grows with the introduction of phones as a distraction which worsens the situation, but it is still their job to try and care. It will take time to identify ourselves without screens, and removing them from schools all together I believe will help students reclaim their personalities and succeed.

What would the world be like without our everyday screens? Is that even possible? We don't know if going back in time would even be beneficial, but most claim to want that. Specifically, Perkins includes this same feeling in her writing, conveying that she too wishes to grow up in a different time. She says, "Whenever I talk to my parents about their childhood... constantly riding their bikes and spending a majority of their time hanging out with friends in the great outdoors... parents grew up in the late 70s, it makes me realize how much technology has changed over the last 100 years. I wish I was born in the time period where I could grow up without getting into a fight with other girls by simply saying something like 'okay.'" (Perkins). Many like Perkins compare themselves to the past generation as they share stories of simpler times. Even those who embrace an off the grid lifestyle, they still can't escape how deeply technology is integrated into our lives. The issue is that every day it gets harder to disconnect, the addiction and dependence keeps growing. Anderson affirms that technology is incorporated into our everyday lives and illustrates how it impacts us. She says,

Even schoolwork is rapidly transitioning to becoming almost all digital. It is a rare occurrence if I have an assignment that is to be submitted on paper; written as opposed to typed. Other areas of our lives like shopping, even grocery shopping, can be done completely over apps. The list is growing ever longer by the day. Dating, meetings, reading, and writing are just a small list of things that have been greatly influenced by the increase of digitalization. So, of course we are all addicted and of course this issue isn't a simple fix (Anderson).

Anderson truly incorporates the struggles of our addiction with everyday needs, and shows us how we can't escape it. It's unfortunate to realize this fact.

___continue to explain quote... transition to turkle quote about "conversations require time"....

Conclusion paragraph!

Works Cited

Turkle, Sherry. *The Empathy Diaries: A Memoir*. New York, Penguin Press, 2021.

Anderson, Kaia. *Helping the Addict: A Call To Action*. UNEportfolio, [_url_____](#). Accessed 6 April 2025.

Perkins, Peyton. *Where Did We Go Wrong?* UNEportfolio, [__url_____](#). Accessed 6 April 2025.