



Barely a day goes by that we don't see 'screen time', 'social media trends', 'phones in schools' or 'the effects of gaming' dominating the headlines.

As a school counsellor, I'm able to witness on a daily basis, the effects that this is all having on our children so I wanted to take this opportunity to share some of my findings with you.

As someone who advocates mental wellbeing in schools, I didn't automatically see the potential ban of mobile phones in schools as a good thing. I know that there are students who suffer from anxiety, who feel that their anxiety eases if they have access to their phones and can contact home if they're struggling. This seems to be a good argument for allowing students access to phones...until we look at the bigger picture.

It goes without saying that we're living in concerning times and as parents we can sometimes feel torn between what we feel is best for our children and what society wants for our children. It's true to say that we're responsible for raising our children but, sadly, we have very little say in the world in which we raise them. At times, we can feel as though we're fighting a losing battle against corporate giants who rely on society's addiction to technology.

Addiction to technology is a strong term and not one I use lightly. Verywellhealth.com explains that the definition of smartphone addiction is if a person feels anger, sadness or anxiety when they don't have access to their phone. Something which many of us can recognise in our children (and perhaps ourselves). A new concern is on the horizon for the younger generation though, and that is the impact that COVID-19 and isolation has had on children who hadn't already built up the maturity of socialising and face to face interactions. People relied heavily on technology to help them through some incredibly tough times and for many, smartphones felt like a necessity. The end to lockdowns brought a wave of mixed emotions. Some, thankful that normal life could resume. For others, anxiety over normal life resuming. For all, a newfound need for technology. Fast forward 3 years and that need has developed into an addiction for many.

I regularly see children who struggle to communicate without the use of phones. RPCC has an amazing pastoral team who are there to help students when they are struggling. These face-to-face interactions with staff, explaining their worries is important for healthy well-being, not only for now but also for their futures, in their personal lives and the workplace.

The ability to concentrate for long periods of time at school is also something that I hear a lot of in the counselling room. It can be a real struggle for some children to focus for as long as 50 minutes in a lesson. When asked if it is possible to sit through a film at home without picking up their phones throughout, the answers seem to confirm their reliance on phones. Research has shown that the constant scrolling through videos or the distraction of notifications can decrease a child's focus, leading to shorter attention spans and increased anxiety.

Our children deserve the chance to have 6 hours of screen-free time during the day (at the very least). Giving them the opportunity to be away from the one thing that causes the most amount of anxiety, even though it feels as if it eases it.