

Research: Teenage use of mobile devices during the night

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Initial research reveals almost half of teenagers check mobile devices during the night

Embargoed until 00.01 Thurs Oct 6

HMC, in partnership with online safety organisation Digital Awareness UK (DAUK), has conducted a survey of 2,750 pupils aged 11-18, looking into teenage use of mobile devices overnight and the impact this is having on their health and wellbeing.

The survey found:

- Almost half (45%) of students admit they check their mobile device after going to bed. Of those:
 - A quarter (23%) check their mobile device more than 10 times a night
 - A quarter (25%) spend more than an hour on their mobile device after going to bed (just over 11% of the whole)
 - A third (32%) of these students' parents are not aware that they check their mobile device after going to bed
- Almost all (94%) of these students are on social media after going to bed
- 75% are listening to music after going to bed
- Over half (57%) are watching films
- 70% of boys are playing games after going to bed
- 10% of students said they'd feel stressed about missing out if they didn't check their mobile device before going to sleep
- 38% of students said they'd be curious to know what's happening if they didn't check their mobile device before going to sleep

Other findings show that:

- 68% of students say that using their mobile devices at night affects their school work.
- A quarter of students (25%) also say they feel tired during the day because of how often they use their mobile device at night
- Almost half (42%) of students keep their phone next to their bed at night



These findings are particularly relevant at this time as safety group Internet Matters recently found that more children fall victim of cyberbullying at the start of the school academic year than any other time due to the fact many of them have increased access to mobile devices*.

Mike Buchanan, Chair of HMC and Head of Ashford School said:

“As teachers we are seeing the effects of device use every day. Mirroring adults, pupils are constantly using their phones, quite often for productive purposes. However if they are not socializing with each other, or are tired for lessons and not concentrating, we need to address that.

“Teachers, parents and indeed most adults are trying to get to grips with the new realities heralded by the increased use social media. HMC is committed to finding out more about how this affects pupils in all schools and use that knowledge to inform sensible and sympathetic policies.

“Schools will make their own minds up about the extent to which phones and other devices should be used in schools. However, we want to start a new conversation with parents about how to influence teenagers’ responsible use of phones and other devices both at home and at school.”

DAUK deliver innovative online safety solutions to schools throughout the country, tackling issues such as cyberbullying, sexting and hacking. They say these findings chime with what they’re seeing on the ground in schools.

Co-Founder Charlotte Robertson said:

“Students often tell us that they are exhausted due to the fact their mobile devices are flashing, buzzing and pinging throughout the night telling them what they’ve been tagged in, invited to or who’s messaged them.

Our research has found that almost half (42%) of students keep their mobile devices next to their bed at night, so it’s not surprising that technology can be such a barrier to proper sleep. This is why it’s invaluable for schools to be working with parents in educating students about the impact technology can have on physical and emotional wellbeing.”

To help students find ways to manage their screen time in the evenings, DAUK has developed some top tips, which can be accessed here:

www.digitalawarenessuk.com/screentime

This is of particular concern given the research which has investigated the impact device usage can have on young people’s health. This includes:



- Childwise found that on average children spend six hours or more a day on screens **

- Cambridge University found that students who spend an extra hour a day on screens will see a fall in GCSE results equivalent to two grades overall***).

* <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/first-weeks-school-year-are-perfect-storm-cyberbullying>

** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-32067158>

*** <http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk/feature/digital-home/how-much-screen-time-is-healthy-for-children-benefits-3520917/>

NB these are media reports of the studies rather than the originals, please check if using.

10 ways to manage screen time at night by Digital Awareness UK

1. 90 minutes before bed

The run up to bedtime should really be an opportunity for you to relax, wind down and perhaps reflect on the day. Whilst technology can be used to aid this process (by using meditation apps for example), it can also be very destructive. Social media in particular can expose the body to heightened anxiety or alertness, and this is not conducive to a good night's sleep. So we would always advise refraining from screen time 90 minutes before bedtime.

2. Notifications

It's not easy to sleep when your mobile device is buzzing, pinging, or flashing throughout the night, even if it does help you to instantly discover what you've been tagged in or who's just messaged you. To prevent restless nights, it may be helpful to turn off notifications, or activate 'do not disturb', 'airplane mode' or mute settings. Or just switch the device off all together if you can.

3. Blue light exposure

A number of studies of late have highlighted the impact blue light (the artificial lighting emitted through electronic devices such as smartphones) can have on our sleep. This type of light can suppress the secretion of the hormone melatonin, which is what makes you feel sleepy. Blue light exposure can however be reduced through device settings. For example, most Apple devices now have the 'night shift mode', which changes the colour temperature of your device to reduce exposure.

4. Unprompted checking

Sometimes without even being prompted, we will reach over for our devices to see what we're missing out on, to communicate with each other, or just to



be entertained. If you're aware of this habit, do your best to break it and remember that such habits will prolong sleep deprivation.

5. Location of device

Many of us are guilty of sleeping with our mobile devices near to our heads – even under our pillows! For obvious reasons this isn't a healthy place to have your device at night. Try to keep it in a location that prevents you from seeing, hearing or even reaching for it. For some this means leaving it on the other side of the room. Others may choose to leave the device in a different room all together.

6. Monitoring usage

It's difficult to know if you are using your mobile device too often or for too long if you don't have awareness of exactly how much it's being used. There are a number of screen time tracker apps such as RealizD and Moment that can effectively showcase the amount of time you are spending on your device – from how many times you check it in a day to how many hours you've spent on Snapchat. Some of these apps even allow you to set usage restrictions.

7. Digital Detox

If you're aware that mobile device usage is starting to have an impact on your sleep, you might want to think about taking a break from it all together at night time, or at any other time during the day. This doesn't mean you need to quit cold turkey – you may decide on week days you will switch your tablet off before going to bed, or that you will turn your smart phone off from 8pm on weekends.

8. Switch up the habit

There are many things you can do as part of your night time routine instead of using mobile devices, especially in the 90 minutes running up to bedtime. This is the perfect time to get stuck into a good book, practice meditation or have a relaxing bubble bath. Switching your habit of using mobile devices for a habit like this could encourage a better night's sleep.

9. Think

We rarely think about the reasons why we are using mobile devices at night time, and often if we did, we would think twice. That's because our motivations reveal the reasons aren't always a necessity – often we pick up our smartphones at 2am out of intrigue or boredom. If the reason isn't that important, perhaps you should consider your sleep and general health and wellbeing to be more important, and stop yourself from picking up the device as tempting as it may be.

10. Reward (positive reinforcement)

If you discover that mobile devices are having a negative impact on your sleep and you've decided to take control back by exercising any of the tips

listed above, it's time to acknowledge that behaviour shift and give yourself a pat on the back! Make sure you treat yourself to something, whether it's a shopping spree, a bar of chocolate, or the latest mobile device (if you think you can handle it)!

The Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC) represents 282 leading independent schools in the UK and Ireland and 54 internationally. They include co-educational, single sex, day and boarding schools and educate more than 220,000 children in the UK and Ireland. Our members lead schools that are distinguished by their excellence in pastoral care, co-curricular provision and classroom teaching.

Digital Awareness UK is an online safety organisation with a team of tech experts including YouTubers, hackers, bloggers and coders who use their knowledge to educate young people, parents and teachers on how to survive and thrive on social media. They run workshops, CPD and parent events tackling today's biggest trends - from netiquette to sexting. For more information visit www.digitalawarenessuk.com or contact us at info@digitalawarenessuk.com

