

Community Institute for Psychotherapy

1330 Lincoln Ave #201, San Rafael, CA 94901-2141

Phone (415) 459-5999 Fax (415) 459-5602 www.cipmarin.org

2019-2020 News & Notes



October 2020 News and Notes

Slaying the Beast: A Practical Guide for Parents on the Dangers of Technology Overuse and Obsession Presented by Mark Edwards By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

At the outset of the evening's presentation, presenter Mark Edwards, a therapist and instructor at Sonoma State University, advised parents that a key to helping children safely navigate the world of technology is to "know your child." Some children encounter greater difficulties and are more at risk than others. "You are the expert when it comes to your child."

While we often refer to "addiction" when talking about media use, in fact, some key characteristics of addiction do not apply to the use of technology. Rather, these behaviors demonstrate compulsivity and impulsiveness, and tie directly into hard-wired human behavior. As a species, we are drawn to "wanting more," Edwards said, "the need to know what's the next thing," and have a basic desire to connect. We engage in compulsive behaviors to ward off unwanted consequences. In the case of technology use, especially among adolescents, that is the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). So they constantly check texts, phone, social media, and so on, in order not to miss out on what's going on and what their peers are doing.

These behaviors can be problematic when they result in stress, sleep disturbance, and time away from other activities. The antidote is help children minimize habitual use (going on media without thinking) and making use less impulsive. Parents can support behavior habits that minimize contact with tech. In his household, Edwards explained, they do not allow phones at the table at meal times. Another example is to establish periods when no media use is allowed, perhaps one day a week.

Edwards suggests that every family discuss media use and draw up a "Media Agreement" in order to establish limits. Some items might be that the child is not allowed to open accounts or share information without permission; that they will tell

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their parents if anyone makes them feel uncomfortable; and, if using media makes them unhappy, they will take a break. It is important to engage your child in making up the agreement so that its terms are clearly and mutually understood.

Edwards then addressed some specific problem areas, including talking with children about pornography, cyberbullying, depressive reactions, correlations between media use and ADHD, and violence. He described the downside of the “illusion of connection.”

There is no doubt that the benefits and problems presented by social media technology vary widely, depending on the child. Edwards explained, “The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer;” those already well-connected socially can increase their connections while for those who struggle, social media can exacerbate the risks.

This is why, he emphasized again, it is important to *know your child*, be aware of how technology is affecting them. He encouraged parents not only to monitor activity but to act as mentors in the use and handling of media.