Spring 2022

Screen time effects/ initiates Social Anxiety in Young Children and Adolescents

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In most cases, everyone enjoys the entertainment of their cellphone scrolling for hours but, how many people ever think about how all those hours looking at a screen may be affecting someone? Having the access to technology makes it a lot easier for people to be more isolated and communicate through devices instead of socializing face to face with others. This may cause social anxiety. Social anxiety is a severe fear of social situations and can be characterized by many different symptoms. According to Sarah West, registered nurse in Pediatric Primary Care, some common symptoms one may experience with social anxiety is having a hard time making eye contact, interacting without appearing distracted, and may have a short attention span (West et al.). These few symptoms accurately express what one would likely do wanting to avoid a social situation.

While social anxiety can be exhibited in children, adolescents, and adults it seems to be more prone towards children and adolescents regarding screen time being that they are a lot more tech- savvy and spending a lot more time on their cellphones for entertainment purposes. Age range has a lot to do with the effect of social anxiety and other mental health conditions or issues linked to it as well. More hours of recreational screen time have been associated with lower wellbeing in children ages two to seventeen years. This study points to a connection in increased feelings of anxiety in children who spend greater than two hours per day on screens. For children

aged three to seventeen years with anxiety, more than one in three also have behavior problems, and about one and three also have depression (West et al.). Some other issues that play a part with children with anxiety include education, conflict with parents, and medical needs that were not taken care of.

Technology can be addictive relying on that fix of a screen, when a child or a young adult is under pressure or experiencing stress, it is easy for them to revert to their cellphone and find the relief of a screen. Becoming use to this tactic does not allow one to get a break and shut off their mind for a moment from a screen. It does not come to a surprise at all that technology can be addictive, it only takes one interesting phrase or visual to win one over, especially children and adolescents. Many things presented to one through a screen has an easy influence. Considering how many functions a cellphone has and all the cool things it can do makes people gravitate towards it more, most likely leading to one spending even more time in front of the cellphone. Sara Thomee does a good job incorporating a review of the study analyses from a psychological and behavioral standpoint. The study regards two librarians at a university conducting a search study of quantitative analyses of mobile phone use in relation to mental health outcomes and other psychological factors (Thomee 2). Out of the study papers used they were able to conclude that majority dealt with a long continuous time span of cell phone use correlating to different mental health symptoms, one being anxiety.

Almost everything in our generation is digitalized, with this being the case it is quite normalized for children and adolescents in our generation to have the expertise with devices and technology. The age of such seems to start very young and because children and adolescent's brains are not completely developed and still growing, too much screentime is even more of an effect on them. Therefore, it would make sense for the symptoms of social anxiety to have a

tremendous effect. Although, it may be hard to catch the symptoms of social anxiety early on in children and adolescents being that their brains are not completely developed and still growing. There are different parts of the brain that are linked to social anxiety that is affected and may have an unpredictable response time for those physiological changes going on. It is said based on a study that approximately eight percent of children and teenagers experience an anxiety disorder with most people developing symptoms before age of twenty-one years (West et.al). Unfortunately, only one- third of these children and teens receive treatment (West et al.).

While excessive screentime in general plays a part in the start of social anxiety it also has to do with exactly what children and adolescents are engaging in during their screen time. For younger children it is more likely that their screen time is based on watching things such as movies and videos and playing mobile games because being that they are younger they wouldn't understand much about social media and information dispersed throughout the internet how teens would. On the other hand, adolescents screen time is more based on the main thing that has a hold on them these days; social media as well as different things seen on the internet in general. Now more specifically when it comes to adolescents' continuous access to social media makes it easy to compare themselves with others pointing out one's own flaws, gravitate towards the feelings of loneliness seeing friends and acquaintances having fun together, and the feeling to keep up with/ compete with what others are doing, overall making one feel they are missing out or just do not fit in. These few things exemplify where a sense of shortcoming may come in, which may increase one's social anxiety and make them want to stay to themselves.

There are many things that contribute to the initiation and effects of social anxiety however, on the bright side there are some effective treatment methods to help those like children and adolescents who suffer from a social anxiety disorder. Lauren Lewis includes some

good takeaways regarding the different techniques to try to suppress the feelings of social anxiety. CBT (cognitive- behavioral therapy) is the practice of mood tracking or charting. The mobile platform is used primarily due to its ubiquity, and the convenience and privacy it provides when compared to traditional methods of diary-keeping (Lewis 2). There is also MBT (Mindfulness- based therapy), an alternate, and often complementary, method of stress reduction and is predicated on the practice of paying attention in a particular way on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. The results of a meta-analytic review on the efficacy of mindfulness-based therapy suggest that it is a promising intervention for treating anxiety and mood problems in clinical populations. Effect size estimates suggest that mindfulness-based therapy was moderately effective for improving anxiety. (Lewis 3).

To continue, other ways that could help children and adolescents that suffer from social anxiety is for one's guardian to implement different tactics to help their young child or teen. Things such as having their child participate in other activities that have to do with socializing with others and getting away from a screen, communicate with them about how much screen time they are indulging in and if any feelings of anxiety or other things are coming about, and try to set an example by watching how much time they are partaking in using their phone. This could give more opportunity to interact with social situations giving a possible less chance of a child or teen experiencing social anxiety or its symptoms.

Overall, screentime can have a huge effect on those dealing with social anxiety. There are different factors on those effects regarding younger children versus adolescents. While one big impact may be the access to technology there is enough things that could contribute to treating one suffering from such.

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