

más allá del síntoma

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Why is it so hard for teenagers to put down their phones?

If you have ever felt that your teenager “just can’t put down their phone,” there is probably more behind that behavior than simply a lack of willpower. Social media platforms are designed to capture our attention through notifications, “likes,” and new content that appears unpredictably.

During adolescence, this effect can be even stronger. The brain systems involved in reward and novelty are highly active, while the prefrontal cortex..

which is responsible for impulse control and evaluating consequences—is still developing.

That is why simply asking a teenager to “use more willpower” may not be enough.

Problematic social media use has been associated with sleep difficulties, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and negative social comparison.

The goal is not to eliminate technology, but to help teenagers develop a healthier relationship with it.

The good news is that small changes at home can make a difference. Setting clear boundaries, protecting sleep, and creating screen-free moments can help teenagers develop healthier digital habits.



What Can Parents Do?

Parents can start by setting clear and consistent rules around phone use. Creating screen-free times, especially during meals and before bedtime, can help protect sleep and reduce automatic device use.

It is also helpful to talk with children about how social media works. Explain that notifications, recommended videos, and the continuous stream of new content are designed to keep their attention for as long as possible.

Keeping phones out of the bedroom at night, encouraging activities away from screens, and taking a look at how much time adults spend on their own devices can also help.

There is no need to monitor every minute or eliminate technology completely.

The goal is to establish reasonable and consistent habits at home while teenagers gradually develop a greater ability to manage when, how, and how much they use social media on their own.

Podcast



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