

# From Father: A Generation of Technology

In 2012, a group of mental health researchers recorded a spike in the amount of unhappy teens. This observation coincided with the proportion of Americans owning smartphones having surpassed 50% the same year. If your child has a smartphone, or you are considering giving them one, “Have Smart Phone’s Destroyed A Generation” ([www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com)) is an article worth reading. The message is straight forward—parents need to limit exposure time on electronic devices for their teens and encourage them to develop healthy in-person social interactions. Youth group participation for teens is more critical than ever in light of the social media trend that we experience today. The primary purpose of youth groups is to develop a living faith in Christ and personal connections with each other as members of the Body of Christ. Assumption’s youth groups are led by committed young adults and parents who know the value of this unique ministry and use small group discussions and interactive activities to assist our youth in navigating through the challenges of reflecting on oneself and connecting with others.

The alarming data from the article covered below needs our attention, as it reveals the challenge of what parents should choose to prioritize for their children. Parents need to be more like doctors; they should not decide on patient treatment based upon the opinion of the patient, but should rather consider the data and experiential evidence that shows what is needed and what tends to work.

The degree of faith present in parents is often, but not always, reflected in the faith of their children. If my child struggles with math that is beyond my capability to assist, I would find a tutor who could; it should not be any different when it comes to the Church—if my faith is weak, and I’m concerned about the impact this has on my child’s spiritual life, I would make every effort to surround my child with people who have a stronger faith. Naturally, parents go to great lengths in order to assist their child’s personal development. Parents often take courses, read books, and become armchair coaches if they know it will help their child in some way.

The simplest thing a parent can do is bring their child to the house of God on Sundays. Let God speak directly to their open and innocent hearts in a language only their souls may understand. Live the life of the Church, pray with your children, keep the Wednesday and Friday fasts, and explain why it’s important to do so. Talk about God at meal time and let them see you as a repentant sinner and not a living god who makes no mistakes. If you start with the simplest things, it may lead to embracing more. Our parish offers Bible Study, Faith & Fellowship, Studies in Orthodoxy, Points of Renewal, and Sermons; all ministries meant to equip parents for their own salvation, making them lights for their Children.



Presvytera and I once observed two young parents at dinner with their two young children. Each child was sitting with transfixed eyes on screens propped open in front of them. The parents were having a conversation across the table as if the children were not there at all. To give them the benefit of the doubt, perhaps they couldn’t find a sitter and needed time together, but a destructive message is being expressed: no longer is going out to dinner as a family and way of celebrating life and love between family member. Now it means: “my parents need time alone, I’m an unimportant distraction, thank God I have an inanimate electronic device that is my only companion at the table.”

The facts are alarming about the impact of teens spending too much time on electronic devices. Parents need to take notice of how much time they themselves are spending on their electronic devices as well as how much time their children are spending.

## The Article, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation," Found:

- The number of teens who get together with their friends nearly every day dropped by 40% from 2000 to 2015.
- Virtual spaces accessed through apps and the web have replaced hanging out together.
- The *Monitoring The Future* survey (funded by the National Institute of Drug Abuse) has been asking thousands of teens how happy they are and how much leisure time they spend on in-person social interaction and exercise.
  - This survey found that teens who spend more time than average on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more time than average on nonscreen activities are more likely to be happy.
  - Eighth Graders who spend ten or more hours a week on social media are 56% more likely to say they are unhappy. Those who spend six to nine hours a week are 47% more likely to say they are unhappy.
- Unhappy teens are often lonely, depressed, feel left-out, and wish they had more good friends
- Those who spend an above-average amount of time with their friends in-person are 20% less likely to say they are unhappy
- In 2011, for the first time in twenty-four years, the teen suicide rate was higher than the teen homicide rate
- Teens who spend three hours a day or more on electric devices are 35% more likely to have a risk factor of suicide (which is much more than the risk related to watching TV)
- Girls use social media more than boys; depressive symptoms increased by 50% from 2012-2015 for girls and 21% for boys
- Boys tend to bully one another physically, while girls are more likely to do so by undermining a victim social status or relationships online
- Significant effects on both mental health and sleep time appear after two or more hours a day on electronic devices
- Eighth graders who play sports, attend worship, or do homework more than the average teen cut their risk of depression significantly



## What to do?

- Put down the phone
- Turn off the laptop
- Discover new activities that do not involve electronics

*"Train children in the way they should go; when they grow old, they won't depart from it.  
(Proverbs 22:6)."*

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Andrew". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Father Andrew