

# Confessions of a Millennial Mom With a Smartphone Addiction

We might not even be aware we are holding it, waiting for a call, a text, an email. Or perhaps we've fallen even deeper into the trap: we're poised to make our minute-by-minute check on Facebook or Instragram. Just to see if another person has liked the comment or picture we posted earlier.

What exactly are we teaching our children when we treat our phones as another limb?

Perhaps that it is, in fact, as important as a limb. In other words, that it is indispensable and we are completely dependent upon it for optimum living. At best, that we are somehow handicapped when we are without it.

But today's parents face a dilemma original to their generation: they have no role model to show them how to achieve the balance between using our phones as a valuable tool for day-to-day living, or as a demigod – the wise one who can answer all our questions (I'm talking to you, Siri) and satisfy most of our human needs.

Ours is the first generation of parents to face technology on this scale and permeating our days to this degree. Sure, every generation experiences something which is utterly new to humanity. Not having to face a world war is something I am thankful for. The rise of the smart phone is a big enough challenge for me and my generation.

I don't think I'm saying anything very original in that either. Plenty has been written already on the problem. I choose to approach the subject as one such parent. This is my mea culpa as smart-phone-as-fifth-limb user. But it's a habit

I sincerely wish to break. As a certain heroic individual once said, "For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate, I do."

It's an uncomfortable feeling, tuning back into the present after a dip into virtual reality, to see my three-year-old son standing at my feet, gazing up into my face. That's when I register, five seconds too slow (which is thirty minutes in child-time), that he has asked me something: "We go and see our friends?"

His eyes, so pure and penetrating, have me flinging the phone somewhere out of sight...for a time. And then compensating by paying him extra zealous attention for a few minutes.

Here's the rub, though. Speaking as a mother, I find the phone a great way to zone out from the chaos for a moment. A moment to breathe and to feel connected to something outside my four walls.

But that's a trap, too, isn't it? Nothing beats real human contact for connection, and if we meet our need for moral support and communal feeling by social media, doesn't it dampen our incentive to actually "go and see some friends"? Yes, I'm talking extremes. Of course we see our friends – I'm not rearing another E.T. – but I am trying to pinpoint the subtlety of the issue.

Don't get me wrong, I think phones are great. As a means of contact, a source of information, and even, in moments, as a way of taking a break from the incessant demands of family life, the smartphone is the best thing since sliced bread!

But knowing how to use a phone *well* requires of me not only a clear idea of what's appropriate usage. More importantly, it requires a huge amount of self-discipline to implement those self-set boundaries. Tough gig; as if parents didn't have enough to worry about. But the cliché holds: are you in control of the phone or is it in control of you? They can be

extremely addictive.

What do I propose? Well, I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint. I studied philosophy, and all I've been schooled in is how to ask the questions. Perhaps, very feebly, I can murmur something about total phone-free zones like the bedroom, or total phone-off moments, like Saturday morning and after 8 p.m.

I must admit that when it comes to day-to-day usage I am more at a loss. But it is something that is rapidly climbing my priority list to address, because it is with increasing gusto that my children try to scale my body and throw tantrums when they see the phone "out".

What's really unnerving about it is that they are not vying for my attention. They just want the beast for themselves.

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