

## ELECTRONIC ADDICTION

WALT MUELLER, CPYU President



### YOUTH CULTURE HOT QUOTE

*“I need to figure out what the purpose is. Is it safety for your children? Is it convention? Is it so other people respect your relationship more? For me, I’m just not quite sure where it fits. I am a romantic. I believe in a partnership. I believe in companionship. I just don’t know if I believe in a ceremony of a wedding.”*

Actress Anna Faris, discussing her mixed feelings when it comes to marriage, *Armchair Expert* podcast, March 26, 2018.



We live in a culture where addictions are widespread. Not a day goes by without us hearing about and being reminded of lives ravaged and destroyed by addictions to alcohol, drugs, tobacco, sex, and pornography. In recent years, the growing catalog of addictions includes things like self-mutilation, tattoos, body-piercing, food, shopping, and fame. Now, the advent and rapid expansion of technology is forcing us to look more seriously at addiction to our multitude of electronic screens. Because both we and our kids are immersed in life on the emerging Digital Frontier, we must work to understand, prevent, and respond to the dangers associated with electronic addiction.

Addiction is best understood as the dependency and habitual use of something that we eventually believe we can’t live without. An addiction is characterized by an uncontrollable and compulsive use of that thing which eventually (and sometimes very quickly!) has negative health and/or social consequences. My friends Rich Van Pelt and Jim Hancock describe addiction as “a compulsive craving, seeking, and using . . . no matter what” (*The Youth Worker’s Guide to Helping Teenagers in Crisis*, 2003). Based on these criteria, many of us know and/or are related to persons (perhaps even ourselves!) who are addicted to technology.

Researchers and counselors are currently debating whether or not there is such a thing as “Internet Addiction.” Many are campaigning to have “Internet Addiction” included as a diagnosable disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The latest screen time statistics serve to support that case. Tweens (ages 8-12) spend about

six hours a day with media, teens (ages 13 to 18) nine hours a day, and parents/adults 9 hours and 22 minutes a day! Some have called smartphones “electronic heroin.”

As parents called by God to nurture our children through childhood and into a spiritually healthy adulthood, we have the responsibility to be keenly aware of and sensitive to electronic addiction in all of its forms. We must understand its threat, presence, and impact. Consequently, we must be diligent in preparing both ourselves and our children to understand, process, and live with electronic media in ways that bring honor and glory to God.

While there are many signs that point to electronic addiction, you can be sure there’s a problem if you or your child *can’t* stop using technology. The addict feels uneasy, incomplete, or agitated when digital activity is discontinued or reduced. Addiction occurs when the activity becomes the most important activity in life, dominating one’s thinking, feelings and behavior.

If you think your child is struggling with electronic addiction, here are four initial steps to take to deal with the problem. First, confront the problem. Don’t ignore it. Second, set limits on technology time and remove the temptations. Third, monitor their electronic use. And finally, get help by enlisting the services of a qualified Christian counselor who has been trained to deal with the underlying spiritual, relational, and emotional issues that have caused and/or resulted from electronic addiction.★

# Grossing Movies of 2018 (so far)

1. Black Panther
2. Peter Rabbit
3. Fifty Shades Freed
4. A Wrinkle in Time
5. Insidious: The Last Key
6. Game Night
7. Maze Runner: The Death Cure
8. 12 Strong
9. Den of Thieves
10. Red Sparrow



### QUICK STATS

40% of teens aged 13-19 report adverse effects while ingesting energy drinks. 15% of teens mix alcohol into their energy drinks, while 9% mix the drinks with illegal drugs, including cocaine and methamphetamine.  
*(Chapman University's School of Pharmacy)*

In 2007, 31.7% of students ages 12 to 18 reported being bullied. In 2015, that number was down to 20.8%.  
*(U.S. Department of Education)*

Source: U.S. Domestic Box Office Results reported by Box Office Mojo (as of 3/28/2018)



## FROM THE NEWS:

### ADOLESCENCE FROM AGES 10-24

Early this year, developmental experts and scientists announced a change in when the period known as adolescence begins and ends. It wasn't that long ago that an adolescent was someone who was a teenager, meaning between the ages of thirteen to nineteen. Now, it is believed that adolescence begins at the age of ten, and lasts until the age of twenty-four. Numerous factors have contributed to this change. On the low end, children are reaching puberty at younger and younger ages. On the high end, we know that the brain does not stop developing until about the age of twenty-four or twenty-five. Young people are extending their educations more than the traditional four years. And, they are delaying marriage and having children later. While many will debate the wisdom of this change, one thing remains the same. Our children, teens, and young adults need older and wiser parents and other adults spending time with them, guiding them, and pointing them to Christ.



## TRENDS: DIGITAL SELF-HARM

If you remember anything at all about your own teenage years, it's that gnawing pressure to fit in. Some things never change. And with social media making this pressure an ever-present 24/7 reality for today's kids, the emphasis on fitting in has never been greater. New research is now showing that some teens are going to strange lengths to fit in by actually cyber-bullying themselves online. Called digital-self-harm, the victim of nasty anonymous online messages is also the perpetrator, directing the abuse at themselves. Of course, some kids admit doing this just to be funny. But for others, it's a sign of deep-seated emotional turmoil. Not only is it a cry for attention, but we must interpret this behavior as a cry for help. Mental health professionals call this a maladaptive coping mechanism. With seven percent of our boys and just over five percent of our girls admitting to digital-self-harm, we suggest that you monitor your kids, and lead them to find their identity in Christ.



## LATEST RESEARCH: SPORTS SPECIALIZATION

One of the greatest pressures our children and teens feel in today's world is the pressure to excel at athletics. This pressure has led many parents and coaches to push their kids into specializing in just one sport beginning at a very young age. Consequently, there's been much discussion around whether or not this kind of specialization is a good thing. A recent study looking at sports specialization among professional baseball players found that among those surveyed, 49% of them were specializing in baseball by the age of nine. Those who specialized experienced a significant injury in their career at a higher rate than those who didn't specialize. In addition, over 63% say that their specialization did not help them get to the pro level. Players also said that specialization should not be necessary before the high school level. Parents, pushing your kids can be harmful in many different ways. Pull back on the pressure.

### COLLEGE TRANSITION INITIATIVE

a resource of CPYU

[www.CollegeTransitionInitiative.com](http://www.CollegeTransitionInitiative.com)



### Sex, Screens, and The College Student



by Walt Mueller

If I had seen the title of the journal article 20 years ago, I would have been left scratching my head: *Online Sexual Activity Experiences Among College Students: A Four-Country Comparison*. But with smartphones and 24/7 Internet access almost completely universal among college students, a study like this is definitely warranted.

The study compared male and female college students from four countries (U.S., Canada, Sweden, and Germany) regarding the type, prevalence, and frequency of their online sexual activities. Most participants reported experience with accessing sexual information (89.8 %) and sexual entertainment (76.5 %) online. Almost half (48.5 %) reported browsing for sexual products, and a substantial minority reported having engaged in cybersex (30.8 %).

The reality is that since the university years are a time for concentrated in-depth learning and worldview formation, what one learns in college is likely to stick for life. Beliefs are cemented which then yield behaviors. Parents and youth workers must diligently work to prepare their children for the post-high school years, instilling in them a biblically-based sexual worldview that will lead them to choose wisely as they leave home and launch into adulthood. Teach your kids that sex and sexuality are good gifts of God, given to be experienced within the context of a heterosexual monogamous marriage.

## New Podcast

**Youth Culture Matters** is a long-format podcast from CPYU co-hosted by Walt Mueller and Jason Soucinek.



Listen at [www.cpyu.org/podcast](http://www.cpyu.org/podcast).

Be sure to check out Episode 56: "The Benefits and Blessings of Christian Camping" with Rob Ribbe, Greg Anderson, and Andy Needham.

## FROM THE WORD

Perhaps you've heard it said that "too much of anything can make you sick." In recent years, that little cliché has been tweaked to sometimes read "too much of anything can make you an addict." Experience shows that to be true. It was partially because of this reality that the Apostle Paul challenged the Corinthian followers of Jesus to slow down and back off from some of their misunderstandings regarding Christian liberty. . . a liberty that they exercised in excess in an effort to satisfy their own desires (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Paul's words should be taken to heart today in a world where addictions are everywhere. There is a very real danger that exists when we take a good thing and make it an ultimate thing. Balance is lost when we go from engaging in something with healthy moderation, to indulging ourselves to the point where our lives are hijacked and we are mastered by that thing.

When it comes to living our lives on the digital frontier, the Apostle Paul's clarifications and correctives should always be in the front of our minds.

Blogger Tim Challies took these words to heart when he realized that his love for technology was getting out of hand. He finally asked himself this very difficult question: "Do I own my technology, or does my technology own me?"

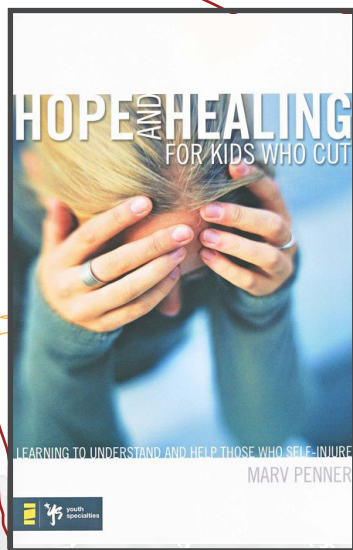
How would you answer that question about yourself? How would you answer that question about your children? Prayerfully meditate on 1 Corinthians 6:12. Then, do what you must to be sure that you're living your life being mastered by The Master.

**"ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME,' BUT NOT ALL THINGS ARE HELPFUL. 'ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME,' BUT I WILL NOT BE ENSLAVED BY ANYTHING."**

**1 CORINTHIANS 6:12**

## HELPFUL RESOURCE ←

Self-injury has moved into the mainstream, as more kids are cutting to cope with their emotional pain, and more parents and youth workers are scrambling to help. Unless you are a trained counselor, you will most likely be unable to handle the kind and depth of counseling needed to help habitual self-injurers. But if we realize how we are uniquely positioned to discover the behavior, refer kids for help, and pray for and support those who cut, an understanding of self-injury is a crucial weapon in our ministry arsenal. Dr. Marv Penner's book, *Hope and Healing for Kids Who Cut: Learning to Understand and Help Those Who Self-Injure* offers both an explanation and course of action that youth workers and parents alike will find immensely helpful.



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