Two Days With No Phone

Experts worry that teen texting is out of control. Could you give up your phone for 48 hours? Our brave volunteers did.
Instead of sleeping, Kenny Alarcon, 16, frequently texts with friends throughout the night. “You get an urge,” explains Kenny, who resides in the Bronx in New York City. “When I get a text, I’m itching to respond to it even if I want to sleep.”

Franchesca Garcia, a high school senior from Providence, Rhode Island, has also felt compelled to stay connected. We asked how many texts she sent and received daily. “I don’t know ... maybe 1,000?” she responded. “It’s too many to count.”

It probably won’t surprise you that teenagers are texting more than ever before. (See page 24 for a chart with teen-texting statistics.) Some experts worry about how all that texting is affecting teenagers’ lives.

**Teens in Trouble?**

One concern is that students might not learn correct grammar and spelling if their writing is made up primarily of text messages. Experts also worry that excessive texting and insufficient time interacting with others face-to-face could be hurting teens’ personal relationships.

In addition, texting (and using social media) can dominate hours that might otherwise be spent studying, exercising, pursuing a hobby, or simply relaxing.

Dr. Elizabeth Dowdell, a professor at Villanova University in Pennsylvania, notes that many people expect to be able to access anyone or to be accessed by anyone at any time. “It’s very appealing, especially to a middle or high school student,” she explains.

“My friends thought I was crazy for doing this. After I got my phone back, everyone was joking, ‘The ghost is back!’” —Kenny Alarcon

“When I gave my phone away, the first day I went crazy. I thought the phone was ringing but I didn’t have the phone!” —Franchesca Garcia

“The problem is, there’s no downtime.” And people need downtime—especially when it comes to sleep.

**Sleep Texting**

Both Franchesca and Kenny revealed that they wake up repeatedly during the night to text—and Kenny even sleeps with his phone beneath his pillow.

According to Dr. Dowdell, it’s common for teens’ sleep to be interrupted by texts. Sometimes teens even send texts filled with gibberish when they don’t wake up completely—a phenomenon Dr. Dowdell has dubbed “sleep texting.”

Why is sleep texting a problem? “Adolescents need a solid 8, 10, even 11 hours of sleep to really function and to think clearly,” explains Dr. Dowdell. If they regularly lose sleep, she adds, teens may struggle academically or become irritable, angry, or depressed. Sleep

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**Vocabulary**

*statistics:* a set of numbers that presents information

*access:* reach, get in touch with

*depressed:* feeling very sad for a long period of time

*isolated:* all alone, separated from others

*addiction:* a strong need for something, such as drugs
deprivation can lead to weight gain and even obesity because many people turn to junk food for quick energy when they are tired.

The 48-Hour Challenge
According to Dr. Dowdell, teens need to learn that it’s acceptable—and even important—to turn off their phones occasionally. So we recruited Kenny and Franchesca to participate in an experiment.

These were the rules: No phone for 48 hours. No computer or Internet either, unless it was for schoolwork. No Twitter, no Instagram.

Would these two teenagers be able to handle it?

"I think I’m going to feel really isolated," Kenny worried. Franchesca, tense but courageous, stated, "I’m excited for the challenge. I don’t know what’s going to happen."

Kenny and Franchesca surrendered their phones to their mothers, and the challenge was on.

The Results
We caught up with Kenny and Franchesca after 48 phone-free hours. "Wow, it was pure torture," Kenny joked. However, while going phone-free was challenging, he admitted "it had benefits."

Kenny missed feeling connected, but he also experienced a feeling of relief from the perpetual texting. "Sometimes it’s teenager drama, people gossiping," he explained. "I felt less stressed because I didn’t have to be involved."

Instead of texting, Kenny exercised at the gym and caught up on schoolwork. The first night, he told us, "I slept for 18 hours!" He also enjoyed interacting with his family, and his mother helped him with homework for the first time in two years. Said Kenny, "I felt closer to my parents."

Franchesca’s experience with the experiment was even more positive. "I loved it!" she reported. "I was going to the gym and hanging out with friends and playing basketball. I had a wonderful experience." She also slept better.

Franchesca decided to continue the experiment for a while. "I think I’ll be so much smarter and healthier," she explained. "Everybody in the world should try it."

Kenny has no intention of giving up his phone again, but he now understands that he can survive without it. "It was a reality check," Kenny noted.

—Sarah Jane Brian

Signs of Addiction
Many teens report troubling problems when they try going without phones and technology. One recent study asked students to give up phones and electronic media for 24 hours. The result? One in five people experienced changes in their bodies or emotions that are signs of possible addiction. Look below for some of these warning signs.
Test Your Knowledge

Answer these questions about "Two Days With No Phone." Fill in the bubble next to the best answer for each question.

1. This article is mainly about _____.
   A. Kenny's problems with schoolwork  
   B. Franchesca's social life  
   C. the importance of texting  
   D. the value of not texting too much

2. Why did the author include a diagram showing signs of addiction?
   A. to confuse readers  
   B. to help readers figure out whether they have an addiction  
   C. to tell people with addictions how to get help  
   D. to help readers remember vocabulary words from the article

3. Overall, the reader can infer that Kenny was more _____ than Franchesca was.
   A. cheerful  
   B. interested in sports  
   C. attached to his phone  
   D. excited about the experiment

4. Which fact supports the inference you made in question 3?
   A. Kenny slept with his phone under his pillow.  
   B. Kenny went to the gym during the experiment.  
   C. Franchesca said she sent too many texts to count.  
   D. Kenny is 16.

5. You can infer that Kenny "slept for 18 hours" because he _____.
   A. got a comfortable new bed  
   B. was sick  
   C. was tired from playing sports  
   D. had lost a lot of sleep in the past

6. Which statement does the text support?
   A. Teens should not own cell phones.  
   B. Texting helps teens become better spellers.  
   C. Getting enough sleep is very important.  
   D. Teens in Rhode island don't need phones.

7. Why did the author include quotes from Dr. Dowdell? What do her quotes add to the article?

   __________________________________________

   __________________________________________

8. Franchesca thinks more phone-free days will make her smarter and healthier. List two facts from the article that support her statement.

   __________________________________________

   __________________________________________
Cause and Effect

A cause is something that makes something happen. An effect is what happens. Below, write the cause of each effect found in the article “Two Days With No Phone.”

1. Cause: 
   Effect: Teens may not learn correct spelling and grammar.

2. Cause: 
   Effect: Kenny didn't have to pay attention to gossip, and he felt less stressed.

3. Cause: 
   Effect: Franchesca decided to continue living phone-free for a while.
Vocabulary Review:
Two Days With No Phone

The words in the Word Bank below were defined in the story “Two Days With No Phone.” Do you remember their meanings? Choose the best word to fill in each blank.

Word Bank:
access addiction depressed isolated statistics

1. For the spoken part of the test, each student was __________ from the others.

2. Recent __________ show that most kids support the same presidential candidates that their parents do.

3. If I need help with homework, I can __________ my teachers through our school’s website.

4. After Liz’s dog died, she was too __________ to care about school or sports.

5. My brother is crazy about video games. It’s like an __________.

More practice: Complete the sentences below in your own words.

6. One result of having a drug addiction might be ____________________________.

7. It’s no wonder that Evan became depressed after ____________________________.

8. Katie used football statistics to prove that ____________________________.

9. My mom is a teacher, so I can’t always access her during ____________________________.

10. Adam sometimes feels isolated when ____________________________.