

How Technology Lowers Emotional Intelligence in Kids

Have we raised a generation that relates better to screens than human beings?

Sean Grover, L.C.S.W.

About this Text

Sean Grover is a therapist and author. In this article, he talks about some of the ways that technology can negatively impact the lives of young people. **As you read, pause to answer the questions beside the text.**

| Skill Focus | Vocabulary |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| In this lesson, you'll trace how a central idea is developed over the course of a text. [RI.2, RI.3] | Let's pronounce these words together as a class: Dependent (dih- pen -duh nt) Empathy (em -puh-thee) Impulsivity (im-puhl- siv -i-tee) Isolation (ahy-suh- ley -shuh n) |
| Central Idea and Specific Details | |
| In order to trace how an author develops a central idea, we pay attention to the evidence and reasons they give for their idea. Then we look for connections between the details the author presents and think about how the author uses them to support the central idea. | |

WHOLE CLASS READING

[1] In "Three Mistakes Parents Make with Technology," I advised parents to create family guidelines for technology in their homes. Now, we'll examine the effects of over reliance on technology and how it can diminish¹ kids' emotional intelligence.

[2] I am defining technology as any external mechanism that disrupts your kid's ability to be present with his or her thoughts and feelings, and attuned² to others. That includes any device that draws your kid's attention away from the moment — such as ear buds, smart phones, laptops — and dulls his or her senses to the world and the people in it.

Out of Touch and Out of Sync

[3] Recently, I watched an entire family in a restaurant eat dinner in stoney silence, as each member glared intently at smart phones. In fact, most of the children in the restaurant were eyeballing some kind of screen. One teenager, chatting on her cell phone, shoved her way out of the restaurant, nearly knocked over an elderly couple.

[4] Basic human interactions — thoughtfulness, kindness, courtesy — were completely absent among the youth. Worse, their parents supported their behavior by modeling their own insensitive tech **dependent** behaviors.

QUESTIONS

Paragraphs 2-4

Turn & Talk: According to the author, what is the effect of technology on kids?

PARTNER READING

Plugged into Technology, and Unplugged from the World

[5] The ability to dissociate from a stressful environment can be helpful. For example, listening to music can release stress by allowing you to take a break and

QUESTIONS

¹ **Diminish** (*verb*): to make less or become less

² aware of; paying attention to

escape a difficult moment. There are also apps designed to boost mindfulness³ and reduce anxiety through guided meditations or relaxation exercises.

[6] The trouble begins when interacting with technology starts to take priority over engaging in meaningful communication. As tech dependence increases, kids move through the world in a narcissistic⁴ bubble, divorced from their own thoughts and feelings, and the thoughts and feelings of others. As conversation skills and positive interactions crumble, technology even starts to warp kids' sense of humanity; they are less compassionate and sensitive to others.

The Rise of Technology and the Fall of Emotional Intelligence

[7] Daniel Goleman, in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, defines emotional intelligence as the ability to identify one's own feelings and the feelings of others. He notes that people with high degrees of E.I. have healthier relationships, adapt better to environments, and they are more skilled at working toward their goals.

[8] Dr. Coleman identifies five key qualities that foster emotional intelligence: *self-awareness*,⁵ *self-regulation*,⁶ *social skills*, **empathy** and *motivation*.

[9] What do these qualities all have in common? Pay a visit to your local kindergarten and chances are you'll find these qualities absent among most children, particularly during playtime. To develop these qualities, teachers and parents strive to foster mindfulness and thoughtful attentiveness to others. In this way, children develop emotional intelligence by becoming better attuned to the world around them and the people in it.

Paragraphs 5-6

Find Evidence: Underline three details that show the negative and positive effects technology can have on young people.

Paragraph 9

Write: How do adults usually help children develop emotional intelligence?

INDEPENDENT READING

QUESTIONS

[10] Let's see how tech dependence negatively impacts Dr. Coleman's essentials of emotional intelligence:

Technology Dependence:

1. Undermines Self-awareness

[11] More time on technology means less time with your own thoughts and feelings, the beating heart of mindfulness. As tech dependency increases, kids live in a state of self-alienation,⁷ estranged⁸ from their emotional selves, disabling self-awareness and self-reflection. Instead of thoughtful choices, they grow more reactive⁹ and less reflective.

2. Weakens Self-regulation

[12] Research has proven tech dependence increases **impulsivity** and lowers frustration tolerance. Without developing the ability to self-regulate, kids remain emotionally immature and mired in early childhood behaviors such as bullying, temper tantrums and angry outbursts.

3. Diminishes Social skills

[13] Even when kids play games online with others, such faceless relationships rarely lead to true friendships. In this way, tech dependence tends to breed **isolation** and reclusiveness.¹⁰ The more tech dominates, the less community

Paragraphs 11-12

Write: What effects does technology dependence have on young people's emotions?

Paragraphs 13-14

Write: What effects does technology dependence have on young people's relationships with others?

³ **Mindfulness** (*noun*): calm acceptance of one's thoughts and feelings

⁴ extremely self-centered

⁵ **Self-awareness** (*noun*): awareness of one's own feelings and motivations

⁶ **Self-regulation** (*noun*): the ability to calm or encourage yourself

⁷ disconnected from one's own thoughts and feelings

⁸ **Estranged** (*adjective*): distant from

⁹ **Reactive** (*adjective*): having a tendency to react quickly and negatively

¹⁰ the desire to be alone and away from other people

develops. This leaves kids with poor coping skills¹¹ and limited tools for navigating relationships.

4. *Undermines Empathy*

[14] When screen time replaces family or friend time, kids move through the world in trance-like states, self-absorbed and detached from others. Unempathetic and unsympathetic, they lack attunement and rapport. The basic building blocks of healthy compassion remain underdeveloped.

WHOLE CLASS READING

QUESTIONS

5. *Stunts Motivation*

[15] Motivation toward achieving personal goals in life, which requires drive, sustained attention and high levels of frustration tolerance,¹² declines rapidly. Like any addict, as kids become more **dependent**, they start to neglect themselves and their future. Watch what happens when tech addicted kids are suddenly forced to interact with the world. They quickly grow discontented and irritable. That's because, unlike technology, they can't control the real world or the people in it. As a result, when faced with difficult life choices, tech **dependent** kids are likely to suffer symptoms of anxiety or depression.

Guidelines for Parents

[16] Everyone suffers when tech dependence goes unaddressed. After all, technology is supposed to enhance kid's lives, not control their lives. Strive to put structure and limits around tech use for all family members. Remember, technology should be a tool for kids — not a way of life.

Paragraphs 15-16

Write: How does technology dependence interfere with motivation?

"How Technology Lowers Emotional Intelligence in Kids" by Sean Grover. Copyright © 2017. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

¹¹ the skills to deal with problems and challenges

¹² the ability to handle unpleasant feelings or stressful situations

EXIT TICKET for “How Technology Lowers Emotional Intelligence in Kids”

Step 1

Directions: Answer the multiple choice questions below.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the central idea of the passage? **[RI.2]**
 - A. Children who rely on technology become unaware of the rest of the world.
 - B. Children who use technology lose their sense of drive and motivation in life.
 - C. Children who rely too much on technology suffer negative impacts in their playtime.
 - D. Children who rely too much on technology suffer negative impacts in their emotional lives.
2. Which of the following pieces of evidence supports the idea that adults can positively influence children’s emotional intelligence? **[RI.1]**
 - A. “I am defining technology as any external mechanism that disrupts your kid’s ability to be present with his or her thoughts and feelings, and attuned to others.” (Paragraph 2)
 - B. “Recently, I watched an entire family in a restaurant eat dinner in stoney silence, as each member glared intently at smart phones.” (Paragraph 3)
 - C. “He notes that people with high degrees of E.I. have healthier relationships, adapt better to environments, and they are more skilled at working toward their goals.” (Paragraph 7)
 - D. “To develop these qualities, teachers and parents strive to foster mindfulness and thoughtful attentiveness to others.” (Paragraph 9)
3. What is the main purpose of paragraphs 11-16? **[RI.5]**
 - A. to offer real life examples of how technology is harming children’s emotional intelligence
 - B. to show how quickly a child’s emotional intelligence breaks down due to technology
 - C. to provide a specific solution for each problem caused by technology overuse
 - D. to outline how technology damages each quality of emotional intelligence
4. What does the phrase “faceless relationships” mean as used in paragraph 13? **[RI.4]**
 - A. increasing the number of children who are unable to self-reflect
 - B. interacting with others without actually seeing them
 - C. having too much unsupervised time using technology
 - D. allowing children to have many different identities

Step 2

Directions: *Respond to the Short Response prompt below.*

PROMPT: Based on the article, explain how the rise of technology is both beneficial and detrimental. Support your position with evidence from the article. **[RI.1]**

CHECKLIST FOR USING EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT AN ARGUMENT:

- ☐ I stated my thesis or argument clearly.
- ☐ I included the strongest, most relevant text evidence to support my argument.
- ☐ My analysis develops ideas, extends my thinking, and makes connections.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: PARTNER DISCUSSION

DIRECTIONS: Discuss the questions below with a partner. Record notes on both of your answers. Push yourselves to use formal language and evidence from the text. Use the discussion resources in the box below.

DISCUSSION RESOURCES**Summarizing**

- *My point is this: ...*
- *Overall, I'd argue that...*
- *The evidence for this is strong when you consider that...*

Clarifying

- *Is it your thinking that...?*
- *If I understand you correctly, are you saying that .../ Did I paraphrase what you said correctly?*
- *How did you conclude...?*

Agreeing, Disagreeing, and Building on Others' Ideas

- *I agree with you because...*
- *While I understand _____, my own view is that... because .../ The evidence I'm thinking of suggests something different...*
- *My idea is related to your idea that.../ You and I have a similar perspective, and I'd add that ...*

1. Schools often have rules in place regarding technology use. Considering the information in this article, what are some ways to incorporate technology in school that wouldn't lead to social **isolation** or other problems?

2. The author mentions the role of parents and other adults in lowering children's technology **dependence**. Whose responsibility is to regulate technology use: young people's, parents', teachers', or even higher authority figures' like schools or government? At what age should someone be able to **independently** monitor their own technology use?

3. **CROSS-TEXTUAL:** If the author of this article were to observe the Hadley family in "The Veldt," what advice would he give to both the children and the parents? Do you think the advice would work? Why or why not?