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My name is Anthony Dummermuth, I have 3 children who have graduated from Shawnee Mission North High School, I have 2 there right now, and 1 at Hocker Grove Middle School. We have really loved the district and the schools as a whole and are committed to high quality public education.

I'm also a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in KS working with adolescents and families in both a private practice setting and in a small therapeutic residential program where teens live, receive therapy, mentoring, and do schoolwork for approximately 8-10 months as they and their families do the work of healing and reconciliation.

The adolescents and families I work with are a diverse group but also mostly normal people, they could be you or I. They are good parents and good kids going through a challenging time. One thing all the students have in common, and I do mean all, is unhealthy, harmful, or overuse of smart phones and/or social media, and parents trying to understand how to set limits on the use of it. Most parents wish they could start over with these devices, not realizing that in the hands of developing youth, they easily lead to unhealthy behaviors and declining mental health.

We are now counseling and educating a generation who have always known smart phones and social media. And though some voices offered warning, we did not realize the impact these would have on young people whose brains are still going through crucial periods of development. Through improper use, overuse, and too early of use, developmental milestones become threatened.

Young people right now are having more trouble focusing for significant periods of time, unable to listen and be present in class, in conversations, or for such things as simply reading an actual book. This is largely do to the onslaught of smart phones and social media taking over their everyday lives. With the flood of random information online, what is truly important and of value to learn becomes lost or indecipherable.

Alongside of this, a crucial task of the teenage years has always been identity formation which has mostly occurred by drawing from the values of communities, families, and religious or spiritual traditions. Today however, young people are more likely to try to construct an identity based of Tik Tok trends, influencers, or whatever else is fed to them by algorithms and endless internet searches.

Relationships are also suffering. Close relationships are one of the best predictors of happiness and when those get more and more substituted by online "friends" or "followers" connection decreases. Quality loses out to quantity and long stretches of in person interaction gets lost.

For teens the longest periods of time when they are with actual people, is at school. It's where friendships, sometimes lifelong friendships, form. It is where students interact with adults who are interested in them, where they learn to be a part of a larger community, and where they begin to discover what they are good at.

The residential program I am a part of gives me a first hand look at what happens when teens get a long break from devices and social media. They learn how to cope with difficulty in new

ways, how to deal with boredom, cultivate creativity, make eye contact, rediscover activities they used to enjoy, and learn to have authentic relationships.

Our schools have a unique opportunity to provide a long oasis and refuge from the constant notifications, the pressure to respond, like, stay up to date on the most trivial events, and to help our students regain a youth not dominated by a screen. I believe this will result in improved mental health, improved relationships, and therefore improved learning. Please make our schools phone free. Thank you!