

# We're not saying it's wrong, but you sleep with your smartphone

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Credit: Peter Griffin/Public Domain

Admit it, you're really into your smartphone.

The young, the old, the middle-aged - everybody uses one. And most use social media. It's just the way of the world these days.

But we're not all of the same when it comes to how and why we use these

things. There's lots of variation among age groups, as we learned recently from talking to nearly 20 people around San Diego County.

Here's a list of the people we talked to, what we asked them, and what they said. The text has been edited for space and clarity.

## TEENAGERS

We spoke to seven teens on the CyberAegis Team at Del Norte High School at 4-S Ranch: Lucy Gao, 15; Emily Park, 17; Shruti Verma, 14; Akul Arora, 15; Pranav Patil, 14; Andrew Wang, 14; Lily Hu, 16.

Q: How much do you use your cellphone?

Verma: "I text way too much. Every few minutes. There's just texts and texts and texts. I'll be watching Netflix, then I'll text my friend about what I just watched. It's kind of obsessive, to be honest, and definitely not healthy."

Arora: "You're kind of used to feeling your pocket and your [phone](#) is there. It's sort of security. If it disappeared, I'd be oh, what do I do now? I wouldn't have a meltdown and breaking down crying.

"(I) check (the phone) every 30 minutes, at least, on the minimum."

Q: Why?

Arora: "I feel like everything around me is dependent on Internet connectivity. If you're going to go to a friends house you don't just show up and say, like, hey."

Q: Would the world end if you just did show up?

Arora: "It would feel awkward, for sure. But it wouldn't end."

Wang: "Losing the internet wouldn't affect me that much. I have things to do at school. And I could finally go and meet those neighbors who moved in. Life is pretty plentiful as is. The internet is something I could give up and still be happy."

Patil: "For the first 10 minutes I'd flop on the floor and (say), 'Why?' Then past that stage I'd say I've got to do something. Then I'd probably be wandering and saying, 'Why?' And then I'd find a basketball and I'd say, 'Ooh, this is nice.'"

Q: Why do people text instead of simply talking to each other?

Wang: Some people just feel more confident behind that digital wall."

Gao: I am not a very confident public speaker. I think, partially, technology has contributed to that. I am far more comfortable with writing my feelings out ...

"When you're talking face to face, there is no un-do button. You just have to roll with it. It's a little more awkward. They can see your facial expression. and anything you're feeling. It makes me feel a little more out there."

Q: Do you have your phone within arm's reach when you're sleeping?

Patil: "I tried that. I started playing Clash Royale. I just get carried away. I just keep playing when I should be sleeping. I usually keep my phone downstairs so that I don't get distracted."

Q: How much do you think you know about the world based on what you see on cellphones and social media?

Hu: "It's only a glimpse. After all, technology is not everywhere, so you can't see everything around the world."

Q: How much do you know about the United States?

Wang: "Not enough. You can go on a website and read a million articles on a state that you've never been to. I could say, 'I've read a million articles on Nebraska, I must know what it feels like.' But the whole appeal of driving somewhere or flying somewhere is that you actually get to see it in person and experience it your way, not someone's else's way."

Q: Why do you like, and not like, that's online?

Verma: "My favorite site would be Google. A lot of people would be lying if they said that they never learned something or decided to pursue a different passion because they Googled something."

Park: There's a lot of great things on Tumblr. You can see everyone's blogs. And people post their artwork, they're photography. But you also come across some posts that have an opinion that may be unpopular. You see a ton of other people commenting mean things, bad things. 'Go die!', things like that "

Arora: I think the majority of teens use Instagram or Snapchat or some other social media. And that's good because, at first, you feel like you can share what's going on in your life with other people.

But pretty soon you start to realize how overdone - how people are trying to make their lives (seem) better than it actually is.

Park: I heard somewhere that there's this company where you can rent friends for two hours at a time or something. (They) come over and take pictures with (you) so you can post it on social media. I thought that was

really weird.

Verma: I read this article about (an) app that was advertised (as) the Yelp for people. It was made by a couple of moms. They wanted to rate people before their children became friends with (them) to see if they were going to be a good influence.

I feel like now you're orchestrating how your life is going to play out. That's just bizarre to me.

## THE 'MIDDLE' YEARS

The U.S. Census Bureau defines middle-aged as 45 to 65. The five people we interviewed at the Bella Vista Cafe in La Jolla were 33 to 50, so they're not all strictly middle-aged. But they didn't raise a fuss about it.

We spoke to Stephane B. Richard, 47, president and chief operating officer, CureMatch, a San Diego digital health company focused on personalized medicine; eeman agrama minert, 42, director of residential life, associate dean of student affairs, UC San Diego. She's also a photographer; Alexis Dixon, 50, conflict resolution consultant, WMD Foundation, San Diego; Lauren Avenius, 33, hi-tech and aerospace industry consultant, Aeres, San Diego; Ben Buchholz, 41, co-founder and chief operating office, Nthos Solutions, a San Diego startup.

Sidenote: Minert does not capitalize her first name.

Q: I read a survey that said that more and more people are beginning to fall asleep with cellphones in their hands. Where are your cellphones when you fall asleep?

Dixon: Mine is under my pillow because I'm listening to podcasts.

There's something about listening to a story that is so engaging. It's this moment where I have intimacy with storytelling as I go to sleep.

Minert: I find that on Instagram you get the most attention between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m. I'll get in bed and post the Photo-of-the Day. Sometimes, I'm falling asleep as I'm hash-tagging. I wake up in the morning and there's all these comments. If I post it in the morning or the middle of the day, it doesn't get as much attention.

Avenius: Ben and I are married. We sleep with (our phones) on the bed or within a cozy, under-the-covers grab.

Reading the news (in bed) has become the new Sunday morning Times. It's a morning ritual to get on our phones and share articles. It's that quintessential image of the couple reading the paper. Instead, it's us scrolling through Facebook or going through feeds on our phone.

Buchholz: I think there's a tension between how long the charging cord is and where you sleep. She has this cord that is like 8-feet long. I have this like 2-foot cord so I have to be closer (to the outlet) than she is.

Buchholz: Today, I cut my lunch short because my battery went under 25-percent. Sometimes, my phone will shut off when it gets under 20-percent. I go, "I've got to get a Lyft home, so I've got to go home now."

Avenius: He and I were going to meet for lunch and he went home because his battery was dying.

Richard: I use my phone to fall asleep. I play games like Ruzzle. You know Ruzzle? You have letters and you need to make a lot of words. I like to play French card games. Or I listen to music or stories. I ended up falling asleep with my ear buds in my ears.

Avenius: (The phone) has totally changed my work hours.

There's a big gap between about 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., when people go home, spend time with the kids, eat dinner. Then (things) ramp up again about 8, 8:30 and go on until about midnight. It picks up again when people start waking at 4:30 or 5.

I know when I wake up in the morning the first thing I do is look at my phone.

Minert: Email anxiety is a real thing. You open up the email app and it starts to download all of these messages and this anxiety starts. I get hundreds of emails a day. There's no way I can possibly get to them all.

Buchholz: I have to open every email that comes in. I can't stand seeing the little red dot there.

Avenius: It's the Midwesterner in him.

Dixon: I think that there's medication for that (laughs).

Q: Is there anything that has happened to you involving your phone or tablet that was weird or different?

Richard: Other than getting the black eye because the phone fell on my head?

Q: That happened to you?

Richard: Well, I didn't have the black eye. But it did fall on my head. I've gotten the phone in the face.

Q: What other stories do you have about these devices?

Minert: I have an 8 year-old. He has one of our old devices. It just has wi-fi, so it's not a phone. He'll call me on FaceTime at the end of the day when he's waiting for me to pick him up.

Mom, where are you? Where are you?

Do we need that? Or is it better to just have him wait? Learn patience. I'll get there when I get there. You FaceTiming me isn't going to change that.

I love it when I see the little ring (on the phone) and it's my son and his face is like this close. It's not a weird thing, it's interesting. I asked the other parents, "What age do your kids actually get a phone?" It was seventh grade, then it went to fifth. It's fourth or third grade now.

Q: When do you give kids phones?

Avenius: I don't know. Two?

Minert: I'm not talking about a phone with a legit phone number ...

Avenius: Once they start going to school, most kids are getting phones in case there is an emergency.

When Siri first came out, my friend's kid, who was 5, used it to plan a breakfast party at her grandma's house. I was supposed to bring fruit and my dog. (The child) had assignments for everybody. She could use Siri to call us. We all showed up at her grandma's house assuming that other parents knew (they'd been invited). But no one knew.

Dixon: At what age do you give a child a phone? Well, at any age when they begin to manipulate (the buttons) and create their own world with that little physical thing. The notion that a phone is a singular



engagement where I pick it up to call someone is very, very different for the current generation of young kids. To them, it's a toy.

Minert: Where do you draw the line? That's the struggle I have. I see (situations) where the phones are literally babysitters. The kids are having a tantrum and the parents are trying to manage it, so it's, "Here."

Buchholz: My sister has three young daughters. The youngest one's first sentence was, "My iPhone."

Dixon: Not mamma, not dad?

Buchholz: Words came out. But the first sentence was, "My iPhone."

Q: Let's go back to first grade. How much information did you have as a first grader compared to what a first grader gets today?

Minert: If your parent's had an encyclopedia set they were lucky. We didn't. We couldn't afford that big old set of books.

Richard: My kids are eight and 10. I'm trying to do a good job at educating them about what to use and what not to use, and I see them being super independent in their learning process.

Q: Let's talk about your house spying on you. Do you worry that there will be so many sensors that they are recording every movement in our life?

Dixon: We are constantly grieving the loss of ourselves. We used to have a sense of who we are. We had a sense of privacy. We had some sense of being able to control our destiny. Those choices have been taken from us. We're grieving the loss of identity without knowing what the new identity is. We are not forming it. It is forming us. The computer

intersects you, you're not intersecting it.

Q: Have you ever had a moment with your phone or your iPad that just stopped you emotionally?

Minert: For me it's daily with our current political climate. I see things that bring me to tears, bring me to anger, whatever. People are posting everything, whether its video, whether it's an article. It's information overload.

Dixon: I saw a be-heading on some news station. I think that shocked me because I knew that happened. But to see it, and the casualness with which it occurred, was sobering. It's one thing to know it. It's another thing to see it, virtually, in real time.

Avenius: I come from a big family. I'm one of seven. Everyone in my family has kids. We live all over the world. There's something really awesome about getting on FaceTime and knowing all my nieces and nephews, and their habits.

My dad does story time at night with all of the grandkids. They sit down, they read a book together, the kids know him by name, they know his face. He gets to be a daily part of their lives. That kind of stops me; the connectivity of it is pretty amazing.

Richard. I remember being here at Bella Vista (cafe) when the incident in Nice, France occurred. (A terrorist used a huge truck to kill more than 80 people.) On the spot we cancelled (a planned gathering) and were stuck on our phones following the events. All of the bad news, now, you just follow it live with your devices.

Dixon: I don't think the world is any worse than it used to be. I think we're hearing it in real-time. It used to take a week, a month. Now, we

hear about it all at once. We get the worst in real-time, and we get the best in real-time.

## SENIORS

We also spoke with seven senior citizens who study at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UC San Diego Extension. The group included: Anthony Riesner, 79, UTC; Kenneth Brown, 73, Carmel Valley; Patricia McCabe, 85, Carmel Valley; Jim Wyrzten, 74, Carlsbad; Royce Weiss, 86, Solana Beach

Q: All of you have cellphones. How do you use them?

McCabe: The main thing I have it for is security in the car - (to call) Triple A. That makes life so much better. I also use FaceTime. I have a daughter in Sydney, Australia. We FaceTime a couple of times a week. You feel like you're right there. You don't feel like she's across the world.

I always think of what it was (like) a century ago. People left home. You never saw them again. You got a letter every six months. Here (with the phone), we're back and forth like she's on the next block. I love it.

Q: What else do you do with the cellphone?

McCabe: My daughter and I do crosswords. I'll do the easy ones. When I get through, I'll take a picture of it and email it to her and she'll finish the puzzle. It's part of a closeness that you can't believe it is happening.

Q: What about texting? Do you text?

McCabe: A: No. I wish (people) would email instead of texting, but they won't. (With email) you can sit down, use your hands, think it out.

I consider texting to be generational. I have to accept it but I don't adopt it. It's really unhandy to turn this on, find the text, go to the keyboard. I much rather do it another way.

Weiss: When they're in a social setting, (people are) using their phones and not paying attention or conducting a conversation with the person they're with. I don't understand it.

I see it in restaurants. There's a person and a child. The child is using (a tablet) and the adult is using his cellphone. I got the impression it was like Dad's night out with his kid. But he's not having any conversation with the child. I just think this is rude.

Wyrzten: I send (my [kids](#)) an email and know I'm not going to get an answer for 4 or 5 days. They don't check their personal email very often. But if I send a text I'll get a response immediately.

Riesner: I've come to rely on (the cellphone). I'll be in a store with my wife and say, "What aisle are you in?" Or I'm in a car and she says, "Are you on your way?"

Brown: A lot of people can't communicate well enough in writing to get their point across. It can be hard to understand what they're trying to convey, unless it is, "Get some milk."

Q: Do you use YouTube?

McCabe: It's incredible. I love it for music. And I like the Westerns. They've got them all - Johnny Cash, Eddie Arnold. Everything is on there. You can't believe it."

Riesner: I love it for my grandchildren, who are 7 and 4. I brought up (episodes of) Laurel and Hardy. It's so stupid. But they love it. They

laugh and laugh like it is brand new.

If I can't remember (the actor's) name I'll put it in the phone (browser) and get their bio. You learn where they were born, if they're still alive

Wyrzten: - How many husbands they've had. Wives they've had. (rolls head) It's amazing that they ever stay married.

Q: I've heard scientists say that digital devices and [social media](#) can take away or mute loneliness among older people. Do you think that's true?

Weiss: I don't think so. When you come back from watching, you're still alone. I don't see why everybody has to be entertained every minute, like a child.

Q: I've been reading about "digital afterlife" websites where you can create photo and video albums that are distributed after you die. You decide who you want to see them. What do you think about this?

Riesner: I'm a little apprehensive, but the concept is great.

Wyrzten: I don't see it as being very different from what we grew up with because we had albums and pictures of all kinds of things about parents, our family. I've got my father's letters that he wrote to my mother during the war.

I have some material that I've given to my son and he's started to interview me about some of those things. That's a way of letting your family, particularly the grandchildren, know your heritage.

I almost sent (gave my son) something that showed the 1950s - Howdy Doody and stuff - and said, "See what you missed!"

McCabe: Who writes letters now?

Wyrzten: We write emails. I use a sort of shorthand - I might not put the subject in the sentence.

Riesner: I type U instead of you.

Wyrzten: (Laughing) I haven't gone that far - yet.

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