

What Are Smartphones Doing to Young People?

Last week, the wonderful, CBC radio program [The Sunday Edition](#) featured a discussion between host Michael Enright and guests, psychologist [Jean Twenge](#) and Canadian technology writer [Clive Thompson](#) entitled "[What Are Smartphones Doing to Young People?](#)". Dr. Twenge is the author of [iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy and completely unprepared for adulthood](#) and Mr. Thompson is the author of [Smarter than you think: How technology is changing our minds for the better](#).



They talked about a growing body of data showing that by 2012, about 2 years after smartphones and tablets had saturated the consumer market, research was showing clear spikes in the numbers of teenagers reporting increased loneliness, depression, suicide and self-harming behaviours, as well as decreased reports of happiness and life satisfaction. There remains no clear evidence that any of those challenges are caused directly by cell phone use (or, that any of them directly cause teens to use their phones more often!) but the relationship is now considered to be fact. Until researchers can identify absolute reasons to explain what is happening to our teens, the speakers were left to speculate on their ideas about how the technology might be impacting teens so dramatically.

One possible cause mentioned was that teen users, many of whom spend between 6 and 8 hours each day 'on screens' might be leaving themselves too little time to engage in other activities that actually boost resilience and good mental

health, like having face-to-face interactions and sleeping. It is well-known that sleep has a clear benefit on resistance to stress and depression, and close, intimate relationships provide great personal support. They also discussed how the technology giants behind smartphones and the apps they support are motivated to earn profit and not necessarily to do what is in the best interests of teen users and families.

The speakers offered important tips for parents, including the very basic, but potent direction to simply insist that teens “put it down” and give themselves time to do non-screen activities. They discussed setting daily time limits and tech-free zones, and noted how parents themselves get to make the decisions about at what age they will give their younger children access to their own smartphones and devices. The speakers encouraged parents to be critical consumers of technology themselves and to never forget that they are themselves the primary models their children will look to when seeking examples of hope to use a smartphone.

[Dr. Ian Shulman](#) is a clinical psychologist and is the Clinic Director of Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment in Oakville, Ontario.

Teens and Anxiety

Denizet-Lewis, Benoit. “Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety.” *The New York Times Magazine*, 11 Oct. 2017.

**Why Are More
American Teenagers
Than Ever Suffering
From Severe Anxiety?**

Parents, therapists and schools are struggling to figure out whether helping anxious teenagers means protecting them or pushing them to face their fears.

By BENJAMIN SVETKEYN OCT. 11, 2017



[The New York Times Magazine](#) recently featured an article asking the question why so many teens seem to be as anxious as they are. The author cites the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) in describing anxiety as “the most common mental-health disorder in the United States” and reports that the [American College Health Association](#) found that 62% of undergraduate students felt “overwhelming anxiety” at some time in the previous year. Parents want to know: What’s going on with our kids and what can we do about it?

The Times article goes on to distinguish between the anxiety we all have that functions as a warning system for danger and the overwhelming experience of fear many have that can interfere with daily living. The former is quite normal: When we perceive a threat, the body activates to provide sufficient resources (like, attention, focus and strength) needed to address the problem, then settles back down to rest once the danger has passed. The latter results when people get into the mental habits of over-estimating the dangerousness of situations and under-estimating their own ability to cope. This can contribute to situations where adolescents are “driving themselves crazy”, [always scanning for threats](#) and trying to avoid anything that looks like it might be overwhelming. And that’s where the author suggests social media and smartphones play a role.

Social media, like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat all provide anxious teenagers with limitless opportunities to compare themselves and their lives against their peers – or at least what their peers say their lives are. People are notorious for curating what they post, selecting only the perfect photo, showing the perfect moment and attaching the perfect comment. Even though many teens know (from their own experience) that what they see on other people’s social media feeds isn’t completely ‘real’, it does become the benchmark against what anxious teens try to compare themselves.

Smartphones and other tech also allow worried teens ample

opportunity to avoid the direct interactions they fear even though it's direct experience with social interactions that actually teach teenagers how to manage socially.

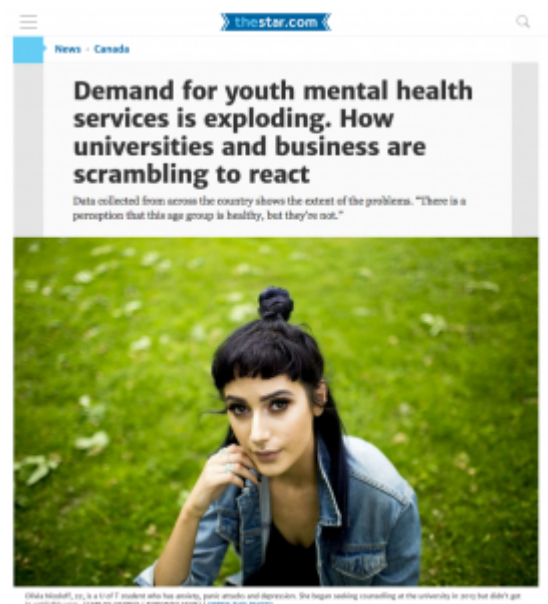
This is an interesting [article](#) and worth reading. Parents and teens wanting to learn more about how to cope with anxiety and worry can [contact us here at Shift](#). We see more anxiety than any other clinical issue and teach [proven strategies](#) to help people cope with fear and worry.

[Dr. Ian Shulman](#)

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment

[Demand for Youth Mental Health Services is Exploding](#)

The [Toronto Star](#) featured an article today about how universities and colleges are scrambling to decide what amount of funding will be needed to address the mental health needs of students, quoting a psychiatrist from McMaster University who said the school's counseling service has "lineups out the door and down the hall." The article goes on to describe surveys showing "a 50% increase in anxiety, a 47% increase in depression and an 86% increase in substance abuse" among Ontario university students, as well as a 63% increase in emergency room visits for mental health or substance abuse treatment by people under



24 years of age.

[The author](#) offered several reasons why the mental health needs of today's students might be so much higher. Most related to societal factors, like how this current wave might be the result of years of chronically underfunded child mental health services, or the expected effects of more recent campaigns to reduce the stigma about mental health issues. Others pointed at trends in parenting and the fact that so many young people spend more time interacting with screens and electronics than with each other. Either way, the article was clear in stating that many of our kids feel ill-prepared to handle the challenges of young adult life and that on-campus resources aren't enough to handle the demands.

Anxiety, depression, ADHD and general stress are very common reasons why people see the psychologists and therapists here at Shift. In fact, we see more anxiety and depression than any other issues and teach skills young people can use to become more resilient. We also have an assessment team geared specifically toward exploring why students with academic issues might be struggling in school. Our services are covered by extended health benefits insurance and we can usually arrange for a first appointment within 1 to 2 weeks. Call us if you're concerned about your student or get in touch [here](#).

www.shiftct.com

Dr. Ian Shulman

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment Oakville is a psychology practice that helps students to succeed.

#TeamUnbreakable

Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment is very proud to have supported [Cameron Helps](#), a charitable organization whose goal is to protect youth from anxiety, depression and suicide by fostering lifelong exercise through running. Over the past few months, a group of teens attended an after-school program at the [Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre](#) where they



were paired with local runners in a 12-week, learn-to-run program. The group built their endurance, with twice-weekly practice runs, and then competed in the Unbreakable Bold and Cold 5K Run for Youth Mental Health on November 27, 2016. Shift was proud to assist the [#TeamUnbreakable](#) runners by sponsoring the admissions fees for a group of at-risk youth.

More than ever before, we know that exercise is vital to overall health and to good mental health. Research consistently shows that people who exercise regularly have fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety and anger. They have lower rates of psychiatric conditions and report feeling like they have better social connections, another important factor in maintaining good emotional health.

Even small amounts of regular exercise offer big benefits for mental wellbeing. Exercise can restore normal mood when depressed or anxious and because exercise itself is a stressor on the body, regular 'doses' of it leave the body better able to cope when stressful challenges occur in daily life. Exercise also increases the brain's production of serotonin, a

neurotransmitter known to be strongly related to anxiety and depression.

[Support #TeamUnbreakable and Cameron Helps](#) in their efforts to promote mental and emotional wellbeing in youth – and get out and exercise!

Introduction to Mindful Living

Next Group January 15 – February 19, 2015

Take a step toward a greater quality of life with a seasoned teacher and cultivate your understanding of the basic principles of living mindfully. Over six weeks, our Intro to Mindful Living program guides participants through a variety of mindfulness practices in



an open and supportive environment.

The workshop covers:

- How to bring mindful awareness into everyday life
- How to contain worries and be present in the moment

- Tools for coping with adversity and life's challenges

The course is open to all adults – no previous experience with mindfulness or meditation is required. Because mindful living reduces stress and the tendency to get stuck in automatic patterns of upsetting thoughts, it is especially helpful for people struggling with anxiety, depression post-traumatic stress, anger, chronic pain and grief.

Registration:

\$300.00 (Covered by most extended health benefit plans.)

Our next group will run on Thursday evenings, from 7 – 8 pm, starting January 15 through to February 19, 2015.

Call the office at 905-849-1288 for information or to register.

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Shift Cognitive Therapy Oakville is a psychology practice that helps people learn to manage anxiety, stress and depression.

[New Fear of Flying Program Really Took Off!](#)



Dr. Shulman and some of the group after the flight.

This spring saw the launch of the very first of Shift Cognitive Therapy + Assessment's new [Flying Without Fear program](#) and it was an absolute success. Five people attended the 2-day workshop, which was held in our Oakville offices over 2 Saturdays at the end of April. A few weeks later, we rented an aircraft and flew as a group, taking an exciting tour over Niagara Falls.

Three people in the group had never flown before, two flew periodically, but with terrible fear and only with medication, and a sixth person who joined us for the flight hadn't flown for many years. All were nervous about attending and almost all were convinced that they would be "the most" frightened. However, fears being what they are, those were exaggerations. Within a very short time, people found that they were in a supportive group of others who understood exactly what they were going through, and no one remained anxious for more than a few minutes.



People got comfortable with the size of the plane.

On Day 1 of the program, we learned about the body and why different people are more and less likely to [panic](#) when afraid. We also spent time understanding how perfectly smart and rational people can sometimes feel totally child-like and helpless when they think about flying. The group was reassured knowing they all had such similar types of experiences, despite coming from very different backgrounds in life. Much of that first day was devoted to learning a wide range of tools to use for coping with anxious thoughts and feelings, both before flying and when on the plane. Dr. Shulman challenged everyone to practice using their tools over the week.

At the start of Day 2 people very proudly reported what they had done to practice. One man went up the CN Tower, a place he had avoided for years because of fears he might panic in the elevator (he didn't!) and a woman drove up the Hamilton Escarpment. She too had avoided going there for many years because of a fear that she might suddenly lose control of her car and crash through the guardrail (she didn't!). A third person said she challenged her fears of germs and her tendency to ritualize about being prepared for everything by giving up control and eating a hot dog from a food cart downtown. While none of those activities were what most people would consider "dangerous," they were frightening for those individuals in

the group. Every person took great pride in their [willingness to embrace discomfort](#) and go for it, even though they felt afraid.

Capt. Joe R, a commercial pilot joined us for a portion of the session on Day 2, and answered people's questions about flight. The most common included explanations of what turbulence is (just places where warmer and cooler air meet), how frequently airplanes and pilots are inspected and certified, explanations about how aircraft communicate with each other and with the ground, and what takeoff and landing are *really* like.



About 20 minutes into our flight. Neither of these people had ever flown before!

Early in June, three members of the group plus two others met at the Burlington Executive Airpark for our confirmation flight with Capt. Dave Babiak of [DB Air Charters](#). This was where people really got to practice the tools they had learned. After a brief introduction to Capt. Dave we boarded his plane and spent more than hour on the ground practicing skills for relaxation and coping with anxious feelings and fears. Everyone felt some degree of fear over that time, ranging from mild nervousness to a more intense feeling of needing to escape from the cabin. In each case, Dr. Shulman

worked with every member of the group individually and members of the group worked together to support each other. As expected, by the time we were scheduled to depart everyone gave the thumbs up and we taxied to the runway.

Within a few minutes, we were airborne and heading for a tour of Niagara Falls. Most people remained anxious during the first 5 minutes of the flight. Two people were still feeling afraid after 10 minutes, and only one person was still frightened at 15 minutes. After that, every single person felt calm and free to enjoy the remainder of the flight without fear.

Our next program will take place April 11 & 18, 2015. [Contact us](#) at Shift for details and to guarantee your spot.

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Shift Cognitive Therapy Oakville is a psychology practice that helps people learn to get over their fears.

[Managing Traumatic Stress](#)

Following a Mass Transportation Disaster

A mass transportation disaster involves the community as a whole, in addition to those who are directly involved. Families, friends, and residents of a community tied to a transportation disaster often experience a ripple effect of grief and sadness. Emotional responses following any traumatic event may vary from person to person as each individual deals with death, serious injury, and loss differently.

Common reactions

There are many common reactions among those managing [traumatic events](#). Below is a list of a few common reactions. It is important to keep in mind that these responses are normal and even expected by those impacted.

- Recurring dreams or nightmares
- Repetitive thoughts about the events surrounding the disaster
- Difficulty concentrating
- Repeated upsetting memories about the traumatic experience
- Feelings of anger at the loss
- Feelings of confusion and blaming of those associated with the event
- Feeling emotionally numb and withdrawn
- Loss of enjoyment in usually pleasurable activities
- Becoming overprotective of family members
- Social isolation
- Trouble sleeping
- Increased conflict with family members, close friends, or coworkers.

How you can cope

A mass transportation disaster can leave survivors feeling helpless, [scared](#), [overwhelmed](#), and unsettled. Below are some suggestions of how to cope with the aftermath of this kind of disaster.

- **Address problems one at a time, prioritizing for importance.** This will help to minimize feeling overwhelmed.
- **Put off any major decisions.** Allow yourself time to grieve and recover as you may not be able to make the best decisions when you are dealing with grief and loss.
- **Allow yourself to feel sad and grieve.** When you have the chance, take time to reflect on what has occurred. Talking with others can be helpful and remind you that you are not alone with your stress or depression.
- **Practice healthy habits.** Help yourself with self-care. This can include eating well and getting enough sleep. This is especially important in times of high stress.
- **Reestablish a routine.** This can include regular meal times, exercising, or going to bed at a certain time. These will help you feel a sense of order as well as a sense of calm.
- **Anticipate that strong feelings may return on anniversaries.** For example, one-month, six-month, or one-year anniversaries of the incident may bring up intense feelings once again. Try to spend this time with family and friends to support and care, rather than spend it alone. For more information about coping with disaster anniversaries, please visit the APA's Help Center Article [Anxiety and Sadness May Increase on Anniversary of Traumatic Event.](#)

How family and friends can help

In the most troubling and uncertain of times, it is very helpful for family members and friends to support loved ones who may be struggling. Some tips for those close to a survivor of a mass transit disaster are listed below.

- Encourage the survivor to seek out other survivors or others who have been in similar situations to find understanding and support.
- Encourage the survivor to find a support group for disaster survivors to talk with one another and voluntarily share thoughts, anxieties, and fears resulting from their shared experience.
- You and the survivor should avoid untimely, inaccurate, and ongoing media coverage of the accident. It can be unsettling for survivors to relive and witness the events they have been through.
- Identify and consider what factors most troubling to the survivor or could remind them of their disaster experience and limit their exposure to it.

Recovery and the future

Recovery can take time. Life may feel different. It is possible to move on and find new meaning, purpose, and positive emotions. APA's [Road to Resilience](#) brochure describes steps that you can take to build resilience – the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress. For more tips on how to manage stress after a mass transportation disaster, please visit the APA's HelpCenter article [How to Manage Traumatic Stress](#).

If you notice persistent feelings of distress or hopelessness or if you are struggling to attend to your daily responsibilities, consult with a licensed and experienced mental health professional. Psychologists and other mental health professionals are trained to help you successfully manage life's hardships and pursue a plan for a more positive and meaningful future.

Thanks to psychologists Ester Cole, PhD and Denruth Lougeay, PhD for their assistance with this article. (Article adapted from original.)

Prepared July 2013.

Resources:

American Red Cross Guide for Families Affected by Transportation Disasters.
<http://www.tallyredcross.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/GuideForFamiliesAffectedByTransportationDisasters.pdf>

Raphael, B. A Primary Prevention Action Programme: Psychiatric Involvement Following a Major Rail Disaster. *Omega Journal of Death and Dying*, 10(3): pp. 211-226.

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Call Shift Cognitive Therapy for help with depression and anxiety in Oakville.

Students Highly Stressed: TDSB Survey

The [Toronto District School Board](#) recently released the findings of their 2011-12 Student Census (click [here](#) to download the survey) and the results suggest that a majority of students may be struggling with anxiety and depression. Believed to be the largest survey of its kind in Canada, the census explored how students feel about their in- and out-of school experiences and their general well-being. Almost 90% of all Toronto students in grades 7 through 12 (103,000 students)

participated in the survey.

The study revealed that 63% of grade 7 and 8 students and 72% of those in high school felt nervous or anxious often or all of the time. Fully one-third of Toronto high schoolers reported feeling under a lot of stress and about three-quarters said they felt tired for no reason and struggled to concentrate and make decisions (see the table below). A significant source of their worry was how things might be in the future.

Student Experience	Grades 7 – 8	Grades 9 – 12
Tired for no reason	58%	76%
Difficulty concentrating	56%	76%
Difficulty making decisions	56%	72%
Nervous/anxious	63%	72%
Under a lot of stress	40%	66%
% reporting All The Time/Often		

These symptoms our teens and tweens are reporting are some of the same symptoms present in [depression](#) (follow [this link](#) for a complete list from the Canadian Mental Health Association), a debilitating condition that can develop when we feel unable to cope with prolonged stress. The results are upsetting because they suggest that while we're giving our kids so many opportunities, we're not teaching them enough about how to manage with the challenges and demands of everyday life.

[Cognitive behaviour therapy](#) is an important and effective tool in the fight against depression.

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Call Shift Cognitive Therapy for depression help in Oakville.

Rates of Depression and Anxiety Rising in Ontario Young Adults

Findings released recently in the [Monitor](#) survey published by the [Centre For Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#) revealed interesting facts about the mental health of young adults in Ontario. The latest findings, from 2011, come from the reports of more than 3000 adults in the province.

While the survey looked at the entire adult age range, the findings suggest that the group between the ages of 18 and 29 years may be struggling the most. For example, this group reported experiencing greater psychological distress than any other age group in the weeks just before the survey. And, while all age groups showed a trend of increased use of anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medications over time, this group had the greatest increase (see table below).

RATES OF MEDICATION USE AMONG 18 – 29 YEAR OLD ADULTS

	<u>1997</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>Percentage Increase</u>
Anti-Depressant Medications	2.0%	7.2%	360%

Anti-Anxiety Medications	1.7%	5.8%	341%
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Unfortunately, statistics can't tell us why young adults are reporting more distress or taking medications to cope so much more often. It may be that the stigma around acknowledging our feelings is decreasing and young people feel more comfortable telling it like it is, but it might also be that life just feels tougher, especially for this group, which is facing higher costs for post-secondary education and fewer job prospects than the generations who came before them.

Medications are only one option for treating depression, anxiety and stress. Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is another and has been shown to be as or more effective than medication, especially when it comes to preventing relapse. CBT teaches skills to help manage depression and anxiety, like learning how to become more aware of and challenge 'invisible' thought patterns that can lead to feelings of hopelessness and being overwhelmed. CBT also helps people learn how to go about the process of changing behaviour to make their efforts at coping more effective.

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Treat Anxiety with Exposure Therapy

Exposure therapy is a cornerstone of the treatment of anxiety because it enables people who are afraid of something to gather realistic evidence about what that thing is REALLY like, and then make more thoughtful decisions about



whether they want to continue being afraid. This is a difficult concept for most people because anxiety usually feels so automatic and scary that it seems odd to consider that we might be able to control it. However, it's true.

As outlined in previous posts (see '[The Trouble With Automatic Thoughts](#)' and "[Reacting AND Responding](#)" for examples) the body is built to protect itself by acting without the need for conscious thought. When we're young, our brain begins the lifelong process of developing models and understandings about what is 'safe' and 'dangerous.' We learn from direct experience, by watching others, and by putting two and two together that we should move towards some things stay away from others. Over time, these models become ingrained and we no longer need to spend much brainpower on figuring out what might happen, freeing the brain for other, more important activities. Whenever we see, hear, smell, taste or touch something, the brain consults these models and instantly prepares the body to fight or flee. The physical and emotional arousal that results is what we commonly refer to as 'anxiety.'

Treating anxiety with exposure therapy involves gradually bringing yourself into contact with elements of the things, places or situations you fear. Over time, two important

discoveries emerge: First, you learn that the situation isn't as bad as you anticipated and, second, you learn that you can actually cope with it. As the body's arousal comes down beliefs about being in danger are replaced with beliefs about coping (eg, 'I can do this'). The act of facing your fears instead of running away gives you time to experience the feared object/situation realistically, as it truly is, instead of continuing to view it through the lens of the worst-case scenario.

Consider the case of a young woman on a camping trip who was afraid to swim in a lake. Her brain told her that the murky water was "gross" and "dirty" and full of animals that might be dangerous. She had heard tales of snapping turtles and knew that fish felt slimy when you touched them. She had also seen movies like "Jaws" and others that highlighted dangerous things that might lurk in the shadows. She was terrified of entering the water and avoided it even though her friends were having a great time swimming in the sun.

With encouragement and a strong desire to see what she could do, she broke the challenge of entering the lake into smaller, more manageable steps and began the process of exposing herself to her fear. First she sat with her legs in the water and waited about 10 minutes for her anxiety to come down. When she was comfortable with that she eased more of herself in and stopped when she felt too afraid to continue. Again, she waited about 10 minutes until her fear came down and asked her friends to stay close by, 'just in case.' When she felt comfortable with that, she pushed off the rocks and moved cautiously out into the lake. She left the water after only a few seconds on her first try, but calmed herself and tried again. Within a few minutes her anxiety came down and she was able to swim farther out.

Although the young woman never totally lost her fear and continued to dislike it whenever her feet touched the slippery rocks below, she took the time to believe in herself. With

exposure and the support of those around her, she discovered that she could actually cope with something that scared her.

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