

President's Message

April is an exceptional month for our Branch. Our mission: To advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education and advocacy is illustrated by our April activities. We hold our Annual Meeting, elect officers to guide our organization, we honor young girls as they prepare to attend Tech Trek Science summer camp at a major university, we recognize the accomplishments of young women with scholarships as they matriculate into university life, we distribute books to elementary school children, encouraging the power of books through the love of reading. And we play bridge, cook together, read together, eat together, learn, and laugh together. It is Spring time: we are ready for the world! P.S. This Waves edition includes 2 articles on brain health & 1 on difficult conversations. pages 8, 9 & 11.

Jean Burns Slater

April Events

- 3 6:30 pm Board Meeting: Zoom
 - 5 7:00 pm Scholarship Meeting: Maurina Kusell's home
 - 6 11:30 am: Lunch Bunch: Hapy's Pismo Beach
 - 7 11:30 pm Daytime Page Turners: Rooster Creek, A.G
 - 11 6:30 pm Night Readers: Rose Ann Steiner's home
 - 19 12:30 pm Finessing Femmes Bridge: Barbara Cotton's home
 - 20 Newsletter Deadline
 - 24...6:30 pm General Branch Meeting: Arroyo Grande Women's Club
- No Great Decisions Meeting

May Events Preview

- 1 6:30 pm Board Meeting: Zoom
- 4 11:30 am Lunch Bunch
- 5 11:30 am Daytime Page Turners
- 20 10 am General Meeting: Patti Melsheimer's home

April Birthdays

- 6 Patti Melsheimer

April General Meeting

Officer Elections, Tech Trek and Scholarship Awardees

Monday: April 24 6:30 pm

Arroyo Grande Women's Club

Meet Middle School Tech Trekkers and High School Scholarship Awardees and their families

. See page 3 for details

Upcoming April Board Meeting

The April Board meeting will be held on **April 3 at 6:30 PM**, via Zoom. If you or your committee have an action item to place on the agenda for this meeting, please forward it to Jean Burns Slater, jbslater2006@gmail.com by **March 30** for it to be considered at the meeting. Thank you!

March Board Meeting Report

The March board meeting was held on **Monday, March 6 at 6:30 PM**, via ZOOM. This meeting met quorum requirements. The Treasurer's Report noted the following: \$5,500 was drawn for Tech Trek. AAUW National dues are increasing from \$67 to \$72. CA AAUW dues remain the same at \$20. Current local dues are \$18. It was decided that no increase in local dues will occur and that the Branch will absorb the National AAUW dues increase, keeping the Branch total dues at \$105 for the 2023-2024 year. Treasurer Hinojosa suggested that by keeping membership at 31 and the same number of advertising sponsors, we will have a balanced budget. It was decided that membership should be made aware that our Branch was absorbing the National dues increase. Program topics include: **April** -Annual Meeting: Election of Officers, Scholarship and Tech Trek Awardees Presentation April 24, Monday at 6:30 pm at the Women's Club **May**- Installation of Officers General Meeting: Patti Melsheimer's home, May 20, Saturday, 10 am. Brunch type foods will be provided by Branch members.

AAUW Five Cities Pismo Beach Treasurer's Report for February

Operating Expenses	Proposed Budgeted	Month	YTD
Community Center Rent	\$396.00		\$396.00
Membership Directory	\$90.00		\$86.13
Program Expenses	\$0.00		
Hospitality	\$221.00		\$91.25
Insurance	\$202.00		\$202.00
Post Office Box Rental	\$166.00		\$166.00
President's Expenses	\$0.00		
Treasurer's Expenses	\$0.00		
Publicity	\$0.00		
Newsletter Expenses	\$10.00		
Out-going President's Pin	\$0.00		
Raffle/Bingo permit	\$30.00		\$30.00
Annual State Renewal Fee	\$25.00		\$25.00
Membership adjustment			\$87.00
Unencumbered funds	\$0.00		
EXPENSES	\$1,140.00	\$0.00	\$1,083.38

Account Balance 3.1.2023	\$46,226.10
Reserves (Tech Trek, Op. Exp.)	-29,513.62
Monthly reserve draws	-\$5,500.00
Unencumbered funds*	-\$100.00
Monthly expenses	-\$409.00
Monthly income	
Remaining operating funds	\$10,603.48

*Donation in unencumbered funds until a need is established

Operating Income	Proposed Budgeted	Month	YTD
31 Memberships @ \$18	\$540.00		\$558.00
Advertising (12 Sponsors)	\$600.00		\$700.00
Operating Income	\$1,140.00	\$0.00	\$1,258.00

Fundraising Income			
	Gross	Exp./Tax	Net
Fall Bingo and Silent Auction	\$7,657.93	\$516.91	\$7,141.02
Adopt-a-Poll	\$1,512.00	\$0.00	\$1,512.00
Total Fundraising Income	\$9,169.93	\$516.91	\$8,653.02

Reserve 2022-2023	Carry Over	Distribution	Balance
Scholarship (10%)	\$0.00	\$865.30	\$865.30
Tech Trek (32.5%)	\$9,274.13	\$2,812.23	\$6,586.36
Eager Reader(22.5%)	\$4,748.76	\$1,946.93	\$6,695.69
AAUW Funds (15%)	\$0.00	\$1,297.95	\$1,297.95
General Reserve (20%)	\$12,337.71	\$1,730.60	\$14,068.31
Total Reserves on Hand	\$26,360.60	\$8,653.02	\$29,513.62

Anticipated Fundraising Distribution 2023-2024 of \$8,653.02		
Scholarship (10%)	\$865.30	This amount is added to the Carry over from 2022-2023
Tech Trek (32.5%)	\$2,812.23	
Eager Reader (22.5%)	\$1,946.93	
AAUW Funds (15%)	\$1,297.95	
General Reserves (20%)	\$1,730.60	
Fundraising Totals	\$8,653.02	

2022-2023 Dues collected to date, 31 members: \$3255.00
2022-2023 Dues paid to State/National: \$2697.00
Branch portion of dues: \$558.00 (\$18/member)

The March 11 General Meeting was cancelled due to weather and safety concerns. The Reader's Theater planned for this meeting will be presented at the May 20 Saturday, General Meeting, 10 AM at Patti Melsheimer's home. At this meeting you can participate in a Readers' Theater to share the stories of notable South County women.

Annual Meeting: April 24 Monday, 6:30 pm Arroyo Grande Women's Club
Officer Elections
Tech Trek Scholarship Awardees, Five Cities Pismo Beach Scholarship Awardees

Presentation of the slate of Branch Officers for the 2023-2024 Year was made through the March newsletter and confirmed by a message that replaced the March meeting which was cancelled, due to weather and safety concerns. The Board approved the following slate of officers for the 2023-2024 year, as presented by the Nominating Committee of Rose Ann Steiner, Susan Brazil and Liz Wineman.
President Jean Burns Slater Treasurer Erica Hinojosa Secretary Pam Zirion
The election will take place at the April 24, 2023 Annual Meeting. Additional nominations from Branch members are open until April 10 to allow notification to all Branch members 14 days prior to the election. Present your nominations to a member of the Nominating Committee for consideration.

Tech Trek Science Camp awardees will be presented, along with past Tech Trek participants and families. Five Cities Pismo Beach AAUW Scholarship awardees will also be presented, along with their families. This is a very meaningful program and illustrates who we are as a committed community partner

WOMEN IN HISTORY

An important component of our Women In History Outreach are Portrayals of Women in History in 4th - 6th grade classrooms in the Lucia Mar Unified School. The following portrayals are planned for 2023.



2023-Presentations

Julia Morgan, architect of Hearst Castle and more than 700 CA buildings

Rachel Carson, Marine Biologist & Environmental Scientist

Madeleine Albright, Ambassador to the United Nations & first female United States Secretary of State

AAUW REFRESHMENT SIGNUPS
For April and May General Meetings

April Meeting: Monday, April 24th 6:30 pm at AG Women's Center

Presentation of High School Scholarship awardees and Tech Trek awardees

Refreshments Needed: 2 Cheese & Cracker trays 2 Fruit plates 2 Veggie plates 3 Cookie or Bar trays

May Meeting: Saturday, May 20 10:00 at Patti Melsheimer's home

Refreshments needed: TBD Please contact Maureen

Please email or text* Maureen Kelly (hospitality) if you can bring one of the needed refreshment plates! (text to: 805 710 6035) Include your name, what you want to bring AND for which meeting. Hope to hear from some members ASAP! I will respond to you, so you know that I got your message & am expecting your goodies on that date! Thanks So Much! Maureen

Friendship Outreach

Friendship outreach: Priscilla Alquist mentioned several of our members and friends who might appreciate a kind word from us. They are: Susan Opava, Nancy Sperling, Pat Muhlethaler, Wendy Robinson, Lynn Janeway (SLO AAUW leader).



Next Lunch Bunch: April 6

Hapy
Thursday, April 6 11:30 am
Joan Knowlton

821 N. Oak Park Blvd., Pismo Beach (Near CVS)
Reservations required by April 4
jknow98@gmail.com or 805-773-2845



The Tech Trek interview team, Susan Brazil, Erica Hinojosa, and Pam Zirion, will be interviewing our nominated girls from the Lucia Mar Middle Schools on Sunday afternoon, March 26th. While the girls are being interviewed, Linda Lidberg, Tech Trek Coordinator, will meet with parents to go over camp details and answer questions. After each interview the nominated student will meet with Laurie King for a post-interview opportunity to add anything they forgot to mention during their interview. Once all girls are interviewed the team will meet to decide this year's Tech Trek Campers.
Linda Lidberg Tech Trek Coordinator

As a follow up on past Tech Trekkers, here are few examples of the impact of Tech Trek :

- “My son does interviews for Stanford as part of their screening process for new applicants. I saw him this afternoon right after he had completed several of the interviews. He said, “Mom, this one’s for you. “ One of the applicants said Tech Trek had changed her life. She had planned on being a tech of some sort, but she went to TT and realized she could be more than that—such as a surgeon instead of a tech.” This would have been a Santa Maria girl, but it is a credit to TT. That is why we do it. Thanks for stepping up and doing such a great job

- During screening of applicants for 2023 scholarships it was noted that one of the applicants from Nipomo High School was part of our Five Cities Pismo Beach Tech Trek program as a middle school student. She is highly qualified and will be interviewed as a finalist as a scholarship recipient.
- During Eager Readers Book Gifting at Dana Elementary School, one of the teachers told our AAUW Volunteers that she was awarded a Tech Trek Scholarship in middle school and followed up with being a Tech Trek Counselor. Now she is a teacher at Dana Elementary. Congratulations Kelsey Flores.



What is GOV Trek? To all our AAUW members,

It has been exciting and rewarding to launch the new state-led project Gov Trek this year! All signs point to it being a highly successful program. **And we want you to be a part of its finale!** Gov Trek’s goal is to address the shortage of women in the halls of power. This five-week online program for more than 50 high school girls introduced them to the world of public service through inspiring speakers and interactive activities.

Learn more [HERE](#). Come and see your future leaders! You’ll even have a chance to vote for your choice for the winning team. See if it matches the judges’ decision! Gov Trek is wrapping up Saturday, March 25 from 10-12:30 with opening remarks by Senator Toni G. Atkins, followed by teams presenting their simulated electoral campaign packages in a contest. We’d like you to see them in action. You’ll be amazed at the talent and enthusiasm of these remarkable young women when you hear their stump speeches and see their campaign ads. Shauna (Oenning) Ruyle Gov Trek Program Director

Five Cities Pismo Beach AAUW Scholarship Corporation

The Five Cities Pismo Beach AAUW Scholarship Corporation met on March 15 at the home of Scholarship Corporation President Pricilla Alquist. Twenty-four applications for scholarships were reviewed and it was decided to interview thirteen applicants: three from Nipomo High, four from Arroyo Grande High and five from the AVID program. Interviews will take place between March 22-April 31. Following the interviews, the number of scholarships and recipients will be determined at the April 5 meeting, to be held at Maurina Kusell’s home. It was decided to offer scholarship in the amount of \$2,000 scholarships each. Chief Executive Officer Priscilla Alquist encouraged a director to apply for her current position as she announced that she will not be continuing as CEO. Chief Financial officer Kusell noted that, based on the Scholarship Investment policy, up to 10% of the endowment can be used to support scholarships annually.



Eager Reader Book Gifting

Our Eager Reader Book Give Away is completed. We distributed approximately 850 books to over 600 students. In some cases, we were able to allow young readers to select two books and in other cases we distributed the additional books to the schools to use as they choose. But the biggest gift was having over 600 students walk around display tables and select a book of their choice to keep. We offered this book gifting for the 2nd, 4th, and 6th graders at Dana Elementary, Grover Beach Elementary and Nipomo Elementary. Our books were purchased through Scholastic Books under our former Reading is Fundamental program (RIF), spearheaded by Wendy Robinson.

Books were distributed in one day at each school.

March 16: Nipomo Elementary volunteers included Jeanne Lenehan, Susan Brazil, Beth Hutton, Jean Burns Slater

March 17: Grover Beach Elementary volunteers included: Laurie King, Mary Matakovich, Beth Hutton, Joan Knowlton, Jean Burns Slater

March 21: Dana Elementary volunteers included: Linda Lidberg, Patti Melsheimer, Beth Hutton, and Jean Burns Slater

This translated into three days with over 600 young readers selecting from 850 books, leaving a few books for the school libraries and classroom. Remarkable!

Volunteer help with this activity was especially meaningful and helpful. We thank you for helping us to share our love of books and reading with our local schools.

We are fulfilling our AAUW mission! Thank you Beth Hutton Jean Burns Slater





AAUW California State Public Policy Committee Sets 2023-24 Legislative Agenda

by Kathi Harper, State Public Policy Chair

The State Public Policy Committee, in conjunction with our Public Policy Advocate Kathy Von Osten (KVO), has completed their selection of the 30 bills that the committee and KVO will be working on this year. This year our bills fall into the following categories from the 3 pillars of our Public Policy Priorities:

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 8 “Economic Security” bills | 11 “Public Education” bills | 21 “Social Justice” bills |
| 9 “reproductive justice” | 5 “healthcare” | 1 “gender-identity protection” |
| 5 “freedom from violence” including sex exploitation, DV, stalking | | 2 “voting rights” |

The committee then selected our top 3 priority bills, including at least 1 bill which we will co-sponsor (“A” bills). KVO will spend most of her time working on these bills, including working with the authors’ offices, attending committing hearings, and writing letters of support. These are also the 3 bills members will advocate for in their Lobby Days visits. We then selected 3 next-level bills (“B” bills), which are important but not as resource intensive. The remaining 24 bills will be handled as “C” level bills. Here is a look at our top 3 bills:

AB1394 – This is our co-sponsored bill. It would allow victims of child sexual exploitation and trafficking to sue a social media platform for between \$1 million and \$5 million if the victim can prove the platform design knowingly, recklessly, or negligently facilitated the use of code words for sexual predators to describe the type of child and the type of sexual activity that resulted in the act of exploitation.

SB287 - This bill would prohibit a social media platform from using a design, algorithm, or feature that the platform knows, or should know, causes child users to: purchase fentanyl; inflict harm on themselves or others; develop an eating disorder or engage in dangerous dieting; purposely take their own lives; and/or experience addiction to the social media platform. A victim of any of these consequences can sue the platform for up to \$250,000 for each violation.

AB549 - Requires all state agencies to conduct an evaluation of all their departments to ensure the state does not discriminate against women, and report their findings every 2 years

MORRO BAY GARDEN TOUR April 30, Sunday

The Morro Bay Branch of American Association of University Women invites you to attend the

35th Annual AAUW Garden Tour

Discover four charming gardens in Los Osos & Morro Bay

Sunday, April 30, 2023 Noon to 5 pm

\$15 per person (no pets) Tickets available at: Coalesce Bookstore, Morro Bay Volumes of Pleasure Bookshop, Los Osos Farm Supply: SLO, AG, PR My805Tix.com

For more information: mbaauw1959@gmail.com, morrobay-ca.aauw.net, or (805) 550-5216




ATASCADERO and PASO ROBLES AAUW Presents

Atascadero & Paso Robles AAUW, along with
The Friends of the Atascadero Library, invites you to attend ...



WOMEN IN PAKISTAN & HONOR CRIMES

Book Reading & Signing
Saturday, April 15, 2023
1:00 p.m. Social Time
1:30-3:00 p.m. Meeting & Program
Atascadero Library with Zoom Option

Join us as we welcome former lawyer, judge and law professor, turned author, Jacqueline St. Joan. She will talk with us about her experience exploring the world of women's rights in Pakistan, and share with us from her newest novel, *Inside the Shawl of Midnight*. Books will be available for sale at the event. Half of proceeds are donated.



Zoom info to follow!

Presented By:  

GET READY FOR THE ACADEMY AAUWARDS!

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! GET READY FOR THE [ACADEMY AAUWARDS](#) COMING ON APRIL 22, 2023, ON YOUR ZOOM SCREEN!

We have two amazing speakers planned for you amongst all the red-carpet happenings and awards. We will be hearing from AAUW CEO Gloria Blackwell. Gloria is also our main representative to the United Nations. Gloria spent 15 years managing our Fellowships and Grants program, awarding over \$70 million in funding to women scholars and programs in the U.S. and overseas. She has worked to increase girls' participation in STEM and to increase AAUW's outreach to girls and women of color. We will also get to meet Secretary Eileen M. Vélez Vega, who is serving as the first woman Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works. Ms. Velez Vega, an engineer who is a fierce advocate for girls in STEM, has an inspiring story to tell. She is also a colleague of our very own Tech Trek Program Director, Mary Issac. Get ready for a fun-filled event worthy of a Hollywood red carpet. Join us on April 22nd as we celebrate AAUW California and our fantastic branches and members!

Vote! National and State AAUW Elections

National and state AAUW elections are around the corner. Members are encouraged to confirm that their email address is correct in the Community Hub so that they receive their online ballot.

National Election Details	California State Election Details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 5 voting opens (online voting is encouraged) • May 15 Online voting ends at 5:00 pm ET • May 17 Vote results announced online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 22 voting opens (online voting is encouraged) • May 13 Online voting ends at midnight PT • May 17 Vote results announced online



Getting Started with Difficult Conversations AAUW Diversity Tool Kit

How to Begin

Try to think of the last time you had a conversation that was not easy: How did you feel before you began talking? How did you feel once the conversation ended? Did you accomplish your goals? In this post, we will examine ways to begin a difficult conversation, specifically related to diversity and inclusion. Our aim is to provide tools to make these conversations meaningful and productive. Wherever you (or your branch) are in the journey to build cultural competence, we encourage you to carefully read through this toolkit, access the resources and have group discussions to explore the content thoughtfully and respectfully. Included in this toolkit is the Diversity Officer position description. We recommend each state and branch (if appropriate) fill this role with someone who is passionate about diversity and inclusion and demonstrates a radical yet respectful curiosity to embrace change. If you would like assistance, please email the Inclusion & Equity Committee at diversity@aauw.org

Setting Ground Rules

One of the most important steps to an effective conversation about diversity and inclusion is to set ground rules for the participants. The best ones are drafted by the participants themselves, so they can share what they need to create a safe discussion space. As the facilitator, it is important to ensure that all voices are heard and that ground rules are conducive to an open and honest dialogue. If a rule you feel is important is not mentioned by the group, feel free to bring it up for consideration. Common ground rules include:

1. Listen actively — respect others when they are talking.
2. Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing (“I” instead of “they,” “we,” and “you”).
3. Do not be afraid to respectfully challenge one another by asking questions, but refrain from personal attacks — focus on ideas.
4. Participate to the fullest of your ability — community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
5. Instead of invalidating somebody else’s story with your own spin on her or his experience, share your own story and experience.
6. The goal is not to agree — it is to gain a deeper understanding.

7. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses: They can be as disrespectful as words.

Ground rules may also include participation-management techniques. Do group members want to be called on or would they like to speak freely? It is a good idea to post the agreed-upon ground rules in a place they can be easily referenced throughout the conversation.

Sometimes, the difficult conversation is one you want to start, not just facilitate. Ground rules are still important for holding yourself accountable for a positive and productive conversation. Conversation ground rules can be found [here](#).

Regardless of the forum, conversations about diversity and inclusion can be difficult. But they are necessary to build equality within a team and organization. Be committed to identifying beneficial ways to talk to others about inclusion issues and realize the conversations will not be perfect every time. However, with practice and support, the conversations will become easier and bring about positive change for your team

THE BRAIN OF AN ELDERLY PERSON.

SOURCE: New England Journal of Medicine

The director of the George Washington University College of Medicine argues that the brain of an elderly person is much more plastic than is commonly believed. At this age, the interaction of the right and left hemispheres of the brain becomes harmonious, which expands our creative possibilities. That is why among people over 60 you can find many personalities who have just started their creative activities.

Of course, the brain is no longer as fast as it was in youth. However, it wins in flexibility. That is why, with age, we are more likely to make the right decisions and are less exposed to negative emotions. The peak of human intellectual activity occurs at about 70 years old, when the brain begins to work at full strength.

Over time, the amount of myelin in the brain increases, a substance that facilitates the rapid passage of signals between neurons. Due to this, intellectual abilities are increased by 300% compared to the average.

And the peak of active production of this substance falls on 60-80 years of age. Also interesting is the fact that after 60 years, a person can use 2 hemispheres at the same time.

This allows you to solve much more complex problems.

Professor Monchi Uri from the University of Montreal believes that the brain of an elderly person chooses the least energy-intensive path, cutting unnecessary and leaving only the right options for solving the problem. A study was conducted in which different age groups took part. Young people were confused a lot when passing the tests, while those over 60 made the right decisions.

Now let us look at the features of the brain at the age of 60-80. They are rosy.

FEATURES OF THE BRAIN OF AN ELDERLY PERSON.

1. The neurons of the brain do not die off, as everyone around them says. Connections between them simply disappear if a person does not engage in mental work.
2. **Absent-mindedness and forgetfulness appear due to an overabundance of information. Therefore, you do not need to focus your whole life on unnecessary trifles.**
3. Beginning at the age of 60, a person, when making decisions, uses not one hemisphere at

the same time, like young people, but both.

4. Conclusion: if a person leads a healthy lifestyle, moves, has a feasible physical activity, and has full mental activity, intellectual abilities DO NOT decrease with age, but only GROW, reaching a peak by the age of 80-90 years. Don't be afraid of old age. Strive to develop intellectually. Learn new crafts, make music, learn to play musical instruments, paint pictures! Dance! Take an interest in life, meet and communicate with friends, make plans for the future, travel as best you can. Don't forget to go to shops, cafes, concerts. Do not lock yourself alone - it is destructive for any person. Live with the thought: all the good things are still ahead of me!

A large study in the United States found that:

The most productive age of a person is from 60 to 70 years;

The 2nd most productive human stage is the age

from 70 to 80 years old;

3rd most productive stage - 50 and 60 years old.

Before that, the person has not yet reached his peak.

The average age of the Nobel Prize laureates is 62;

The average age of the presidents of the 100 largest companies in the world is 63 years;

The average age of pastors in the 100 largest churches in the United States is 71;

The average age of dads is 76 years.

This confirms that a person's best and most productive years are between 60 and 80 years of age.

This study was published by a team of doctors and psychologists in the NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE.

They found that at 60 you reach the peak of your emotional and mental potential, and this continues until you are 80.

Therefore, if you are 60, 70 or 80 years old, you are at the best level of your life.

Does Someone You Know Have Digital Dependency? Here's What to Do

source IDX

Summary: Digital dependency or digital addiction is a real and growing concern, and can involve excessive or obsessive use of the internet, social media, online gaming, and more. Here are some factors to watch for, and things you can do to limit digital usage and protect the physical, emotional, and mental health of yourself or a loved one.



In our digital lives, it is not just about protecting our privacy; it's also about protecting our well-being

We all rely on our digital devices to one degree or another. According to a [paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research \(NBER\)](#), Americans check their smartphones 50 to 80 times per day; globally, the average person with internet access spends 2.5 hours daily on social media.

But how much is too much? You might be conscientious about protecting your privacy and identity when online, but do not ignore signs that you or a loved one might be growing dependent on digital consumption—whether

it's obsessively browsing the internet, playing online games, scrolling through social media, or indulging in other digital activities.

Understanding digital dependency

A growing body of research shows that digital dependency, or digital addiction, is a real problem in our society, particularly among teens and young adults. The [United Brain Association](#) defines the issue as “a harmful dependence on digital media and devices such as smartphones, video games, and computers.”

A research study conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research suggests that “smartphone social media use is habit forming.” Meanwhile, in 2018, the World Health Organization classified [digital gaming disorder](#) as an official medical condition.

There is an ongoing debate in the world of psychology and psychiatry about whether digital dependency should be classified as similar to substance abuse, or whether it is a symptom of other disorders. Either way, the problem can have a serious impact on a person’s well-being. And when [things in the digital world go wrong](#)—internet outages, [cyberattacks](#), data breaches—digitally dependent people may suffer more adverse psychological effects than others.

Recognizing the signs of digital dependency

In a *Psychology Today* [article about social media addiction](#), Mark D. Griffiths, Ph.D., offered a series of questions that people can ask themselves if they believe that they or someone they know are at risk of a dependency on social media. Adapted from the article, these questions are:

- Do you spend a lot of time thinking about or planning to use social media?
- Do you feel increasing urges to use social media?
- Does using social media help you forget about personal problems?
- Have you tried to cut back on your use of social media but failed?
- Do you feel restless or anxious if you’re not able to use social media?
- Has your social media usage affected your personal or professional life in a negative way?

Similarly, an [article](#) from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) listed potential symptoms of online gaming disorder, and stated that if a person exhibits a majority of the symptoms, they likely meet the criteria for the disorder. Adapted from the article, these are:

- A preoccupation with online games.
- A feeling of withdrawal whenever video games are not available.
- A need to spend more time playing online games in order to feel the same level of satisfaction.
- An inability to cut back on online gaming despite making efforts to do so.
- Sacrificing other activities to play online games more often.
- Not telling family members the truth about how much time is spent online gaming.
- Using online games to improve negative moods.
- Putting jobs or relationships at risk due to online gaming.
- Knowing the risks of dependency on online gaming, but continuing to do it anyway.

While the sets of factors listed above refer to dependencies on social media and online gaming, respectively, they are also relevant for any other potentially habit-forming digital activity, from browsing the internet to online shopping.

Dealing with digital dependency

If you or someone you know meets most of the types of factors shown above—whether it’s related to online gaming, internet usage, social media usage, or any other digital activity—there may be a serious issue at hand.

Consider speaking with a clinically trained professional; resources are available at the [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)](#).

If you or a loved one meet *some* of the criteria, there are steps you can take independently to reduce digital usage. Griffiths in *Psychology Today* advises a “digital detox” regarding the phone. He recommends the following:

- Turn off notifications.
- Allow yourself to check your phone only every 30 or 60 minutes.
- Establish periods during the day (for example, meal times) in which you have no screen time.
- Do not leave your phone in the room where you sleep.

In an [article](#) from its Healthy News blog, Florida-based nonprofit public health system Lee Health offers some additional tips. Adapted from the article, these include:

- Whenever possible, replace phone or internet use with real-world conversations, non-digital hobbies, or learning new skills.
- If you want app-based help, consider apps designed to help control your daily phone usage.
- Avoid using multiple devices at the same time—don’t use your phone while watching TV, for example.
- Avoid retreating to your phone in awkward social situations, and don’t check texts while having a face-to-face conversation.

Excessive digital use does not just carry risks to a person’s privacy or identity; it can also affect their physical, mental, and emotional health. If you have concerns, engage in open conversations with your friends and family. Share resources that may educate or inform about the proliferation of digital dependency and the subsequent impacts. Watch for the signs of digital dependency. Take steps to cut back on device usage if you feel it is starting to dominate a loved one’s life, or your own.



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