

TOOLBOX TALK #03

Social Media & Screen Time



Phones, screens, and social media are part of everyday life now. Whether you are scrolling during breaks, checking news updates, watching videos, messaging friends, or keeping up with hobbies, your screen is probably within arm's reach most of the day. None of this is "wrong." Screens and social media can be helpful, entertaining, and even relaxing. But they can also take a toll without you realizing it. Too much screen time can affect your mood, sleep, stress levels, relationships, and even how you feel about yourself. This Toolbox Talk explores how screen time affects your well-being and what you can do to create a healthier balance. You deserve moments of peace, rest, and genuine connection, not constant noise and pressure from a screen.

Why Screen Time Feels So Hard to Manage

Phones are designed to grab and keep your attention. Notifications, endless scrolling, videos, and news updates give your brain quick hits of dopamine. It feels harmless in the moment, but over time it becomes mentally exhausting. It is easy to check your phone without thinking, lose track of time, or feel pressure to stay available 24/7.

In the skilled trades, where downtime is limited, your phone can become your escape after a long day. But when you are constantly connected, you do not get the mental rest your brain needs to recharge, and that exhaustion can follow you to the next workday.

Social Media: The Hidden Stressor

Social media makes it easy to feel like everyone else has more money, more time, more fun, or more success. But most people only post the highlights; not their struggles, bills, arguments, or stress.

Comparing yourself to filtered versions of someone else's life can affect your confidence and leave you feeling behind, even if you're doing just fine. And with the nonstop cycle of opinions, arguments, and negativity online, it's easy to absorb stress that isn't even yours.

Remember: what you see online is rarely the whole story.

Signs You May Need a Screen Break

You might benefit from cutting back if you notice:

- Scrolling without realizing how long it's been
- Feeling irritated or overwhelmed after being online
- Checking your phone first thing in the morning or last at night
- Losing sleep because you're on your phone in bed
- Feeling disconnected from your partner, kids, or coworkers
- Feeling more anxious after reading news or comments

GROUP DISCUSSION:

What screen habit do you notice in yourself that you would like to change?

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Healthier Ways to Use Screens and Social Media

Screens are not going anywhere, but you can build habits that help you feel more in control instead of pulled in every direction. These tools are not about giving up technology; they are about protecting your mental space so you can stay focused, rested, and grounded.

1. **Set small time limits for certain apps.** Apps like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are designed to keep you scrolling. Setting a daily limit (even 20–30 minutes) helps you stay aware of how much time you're spending. Most phones allow you to set built-in timers so the app closes or gives you a reminder. You can always override it, but the reminder helps you pause and decide if you really want to keep scrolling.
2. **Turn off non-essential notifications.** Constant buzzing, ringing, and flashing notifications keep your brain on alert all day long. Turning off the ones you don't actually need (social media alerts, game notifications, promotions) can give you instant mental breathing room. Leave the important ones on (calls, texts, job alerts), but let the rest stay quiet until you want to check them. You will be surprised how much calmer you feel.
3. **Avoid screens at least 30 minutes before bed.** Blue light and rapid scrolling keep your brain awake even when your body is exhausted. Giving yourself the last 30 minutes of the night screen-free helps your mind slow down, making it easier to fall asleep and stay asleep. Try switching to something calming like listening to music, stretching, reading, or sitting quietly to reflect on the day. Your sleep quality will improve almost immediately.
4. **Designate "no phone" times.** Pick a few parts of your day when you put your phone aside; even just 10–15 minutes at a time. Good options include during meals, bathroom breaks, first hour after getting home, when spending time with your kids, or while unwinding before bed. These small windows of uninterrupted time help your brain reset and strengthen your relationships.
5. **Curate your feed.** If certain accounts make you feel stressed, judged, irritated, or "not good enough," unfollow or mute them. Fill your feed with things that uplift, educate, or genuinely interest you; not things that make you feel worse.
6. **Use technology intentionally, not automatically.** Before opening an app, pause for a second and ask, "Why am I opening this?" Out of habit, out of boredom, to avoid something stressful, or because you genuinely want to? Even a one-second pause puts you back in control.
7. **Replace one scroll session with something that actually helps you de-stress.** Instead of reaching for your phone automatically, choose a simple alternative like going for a 5-minute walk, doing a few stretches, listening to music, sitting outside, playing with your kids or pets, or having an uninterrupted conversation. These activities can help soothe your mind instead of overstimulating it.

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- **988 Lifeline:** Available 24/7 for anyone feeling overwhelmed, in crisis, or needing someone to talk to. You do not have to be in a major crisis to call.
- **TEAM and Ulliance (EAP Service):** Offers free, confidential support for stress, anxiety, and digital overwhelm.
- **Your Union Representative:** A trusted point of contact who can help guide you through available resources that fit your needs.
- **Additional national and state-by-state resources** can be found by scanning the QR code or visiting www.northcountrycarpenter.org/activism/mental-health

