A USC ANNENBERG — COMMON SENSE MEDIA STUDY | **2017**

THE NEW NORMAL:
PARENTS, TEENS, AND DIGITAL DEVICES IN JAPAN

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Credits

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INTRODUCTION

By Willow Bay and James P. Steyer

Advances in digital media and mobile devices and the rising power of social media are changing the way we engage not only with the world around us, but also with the people who are the closest to us. The patterns of daily life have been forever altered by the ubiquity of digital devices. These shifts are happening faster and more dramatically than any change in recent history, and they are having an impact on people of all ages.

Smartphones and mobile devices have become a powerful presence and are rewiring our most personal relationships, including between parents and kids. A new generation of parents faces unprecedented challenges in managing digital media in their own lives and in the lives of their children.

To truly understand the impact of technology on our relationships, we need to dig deeper into the media habits and attitudes of parents and teens. For many years, Common Sense Media has conducted research on children's media use in the United States. In April 2017, as we began to consider our role at USC's Global Conference in Tokyo, which examines the accelerating impact of technology on our lives, USC Annenberg launched its own study of teens and parents in Japan. We hope to advance a cross-cultural exploration of the global phenomenon of family digital media engagement.

How much time are parents and kids spending with media each day? Do we feel addicted to our devices? Is media use causing family stress and arguments? Are kids feeling neglected by their parents' media use?

These are the kinds of questions we set out to answer with our collaboration titled *The New Normal: Parents, Teens, and Digital Devices in Japan*. In order to give us a true comparison of media use in the two countries, we polled 1,200 Japanese parents and teens to find out how the saturation of cell phones and other devices in family life is playing out in homes and child-parent relationships.

What did we discover? To put it simply, media and technology are at the center of life for Japanese families. For example, we found:

- The average daily mobile device use for teens is approximately 4.5 hours and for parents 3 hours, and 90 percent of parents and teens have their own smartphones.
- 45 percent of teens feel addicted to their mobile devices, and 38 percent of parents feel addicted to their mobile devices.
- At least a few times a week, 60 percent of parents feel their teens get distracted by devices and don't pay attention when they are together; 25 percent of teens say the same about their parents.

Clearly, our always-on media environment is presenting challenges for Japanese families. In fact, this may be happening all over the world.

In the United States, for example, we conducted a similar survey and found that 59 percent of parents feel their teens are addicted to their mobile devices and 27 percent feel addicted to their mobile devices. Twenty-eight percent of U.S. teens feel their parents are addicted to their mobile devices, and 50 percent feel addicted to their own devices. Similar concerns exist around conflict, distraction, and impact on relationships.

Technology isn't going anywhere, which makes it all the more important to pay attention to these challenges and the implications for families and communities. The more we discuss our experiences and study the impact, the more information we will have to help families be aware of potential dangers, set realistic boundaries, and role-model healthy behaviors around media and technology.

Together, we set out to deepen our understanding of the impact of digital media globally. We are hopeful that this new report sparks a wave of interest and action on this topic both in Japan and throughout the world.

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KEY FINDINGS AND METHODOLOGY

Overview and methodology. This 2017 national online survey, conducted by Dentsu Macromill Insight (DMI), details the media habits and attitudes of Japanese parents and teens age 13 to 18. It shows exactly how central a role smartphones and tablets play in Japanese families today and how it impacts the parent-teen dynamic. The survey was conducted in April 2017 among parents in Japan with at least one child in middle school or high school who owns a mobile phone and uses it at least once a week. Participants who opted into DMI's database were randomly selected after being screened for eligibility criteria. The sample included children age 13 to 18 (n = 600) and their parents (n = 600). The sample distribution was weighted by age group. Parents recorded answers for their middle schoolers. Parents and teens in high school recorded their own answers.

1. Ubiquity and use

A generation of parents is facing an entirely new set of parenting challenges: the pervasive use of mobile devices. The vast majority of parents and teens in Japan owns a mobile device — nearly everyone, in fact. And they spend several hours a day on them, consuming content, using social media, and playing games. It has become hard to imagine daily life without them, and for many parents, that is cause for concern.

2. Feeling addicted

In a world where the competition for attention is intensifying, mobile devices are commanding more of our time and attention. Both teens and parents feel the need to check their devices frequently, often several times an hour. Teens, in particular, feel the urge more intensely. Many parents report feeling "addicted" to their mobile devices, and so do their teens. Both expressed concern about the addictive behavior exhibited by the other.

3. Source of distraction

Mobile devices are inserting themselves into the family dynamic. Many parents and teens say the always-on, always-in-your-hand devices interfere with their ability to be fully present when they are together. Parents see it clearly every day: Their kids are distracted during their conversations. Some teens express the same concern, as they notice their parents aren't paying attention, and some even feel their parents prioritize their smartphone over them.

4. Conflict and worry

Mobile devices are a source of concern and tension in family life. However, teens and parents aren't on the same page. When asked, most parents and teens say that mobile devices have no effect on their relationships. But a closer look reveals anxiety, particularly among parents, that mobile devices are damaging their relationships. The majority of parents say they argue with their children over the use of smartphones.

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Parents and teens don't see eye to eye on device use:

More than half of Japanese parents (53 percent) feel their teens spend too much time on mobile devices.

More than 70 percent of Japanese teens believe they spend "the right amount" of time on their mobile devices.

Ubiquity and Use

How much are parents and teens using mobile devices — and what are they using them for?

- **Prevalence.** Approximately 90 percent of parents and teens have their own smartphones.
- **Activities.** Only a small fraction of time spent on mobile devices is for work or study.

FIGURE 1. Average daily mobile device use, parents vs. teens (hours:minutes)

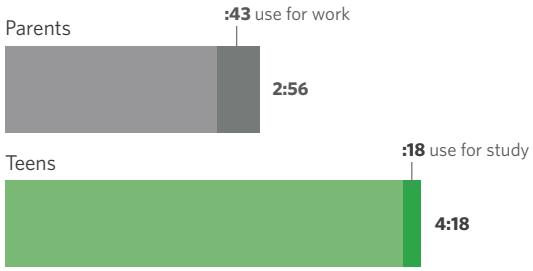


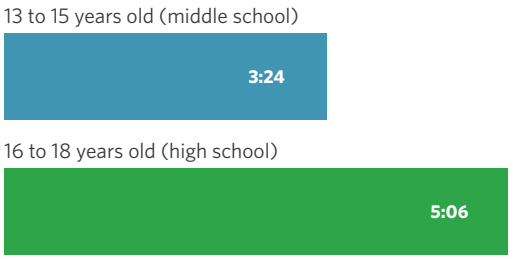
TABLE 1. Average daily mobile device use, by activity* (hours:minutes)

Activity	Parents	Teens
Work	:43	n/a
Study	n/a	:18
Personal activities (nonwork/nonstudy)		
Using social networking sites	:28	:42
Browsing websites	:39	:37
Playing video games	:23	:44
Watching videos	:14	:44
Listening to music	:13	:36
Using messaging apps	:14	:31
Anything else nonwork related	:02	:06
TOTAL	**2:56**	**4:18**

**Mobile devices* include smartphones and tablets. Many people often use more than one medium at the same time ("media multitasking"). The times reflected here could include simultaneous use of media. For example, a parent or teen could watch one hour of videos on a tablet while browsing websites on their phone for an hour. That would equal two hours of media use, but it would take only one hour out of the day.

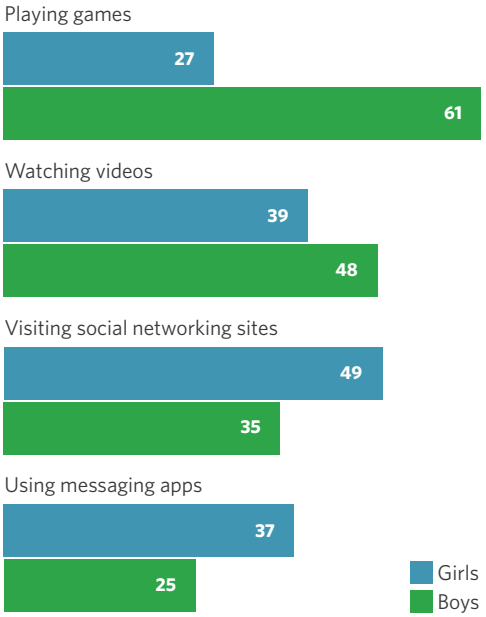
- **Age makes a difference.** Japanese teens' digital media use increases by 50 percent between middle school and high school (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. Average daily time spent with mobile devices, by age group (hours:minutes)



- **Boys and girls use media in different ways.** Japanese boys spend more time watching videos and playing games; girls spend more time on social networking sites and using messaging apps (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. Minutes spent daily on mobile devices, by activity and gender



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Feeling Addicted

The need to respond

- Many parents and teens feel compelled to check their devices frequently (see Figure 4).
- When receiving texts, social networking messages, or other notifications, 36 percent of parents and 48 percent of teens feel the need to "respond immediately," with teens feeling this need more strongly (see Figure 5).

Are we addicted?

Parents say...

- 61 percent of parents feel their teens are "addicted" to their mobile devices (see Figure 6).
- 38 percent of parents feel themselves "addicted" to their mobile devices.

Teens say...

- 45 percent of teens feel "addicted" to their mobile devices (see Figure 6).
- 27 percent of teens feel their parents are "addicted" to their mobile devices.

Cutting down on device use

- 52 percent of parents feel their teens spend too much time on their devices; 17 percent of teens agree. However, only 30 percent of parents and 23 percent of teens say they very often or occasionally try to cut down on use.

FIGURE 4. Check their devices at least once an hour, parents vs. teens

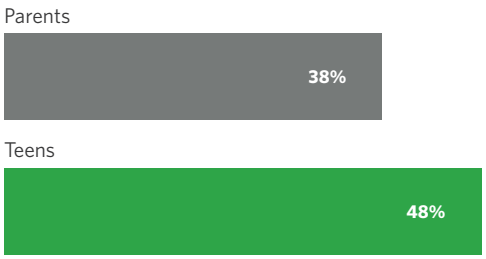


FIGURE 5. Feel the need to "respond immediately" to texts, social networking messages, or other notifications, parents vs. teens

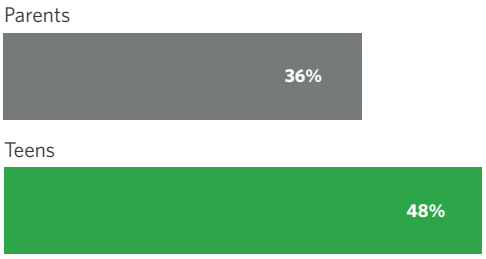
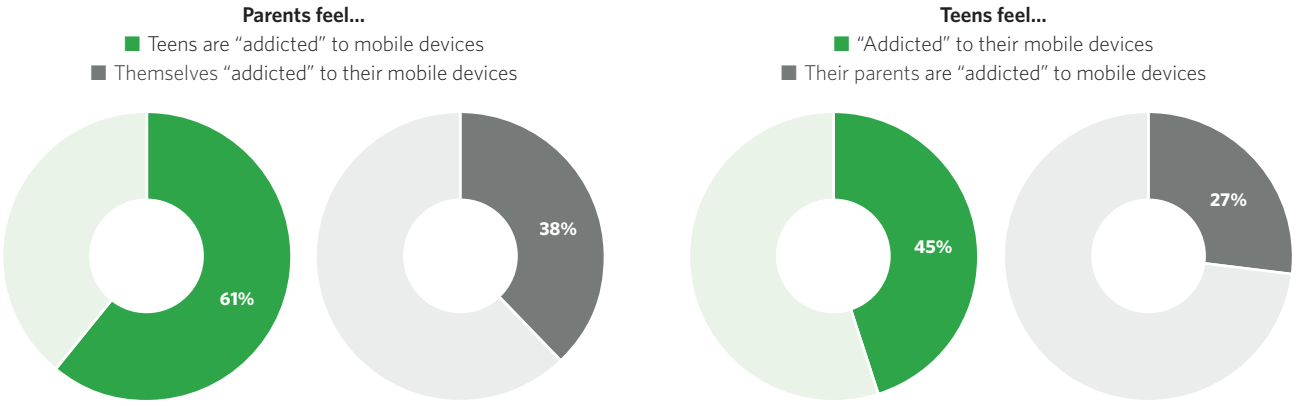


FIGURE 6. Parent and teen perceptions of each other's addiction to their devices



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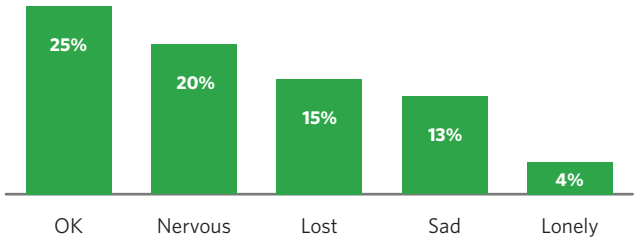
Ditch the phone? How do teens feel without it?

- Many teens report feeling nervous, lost, or sad at the prospect of going without their mobile phone for a day. Only 25 percent say they would be "OK" (see Figure 7).

FIGURE 7. How teens would feel going without mobile devices for a day

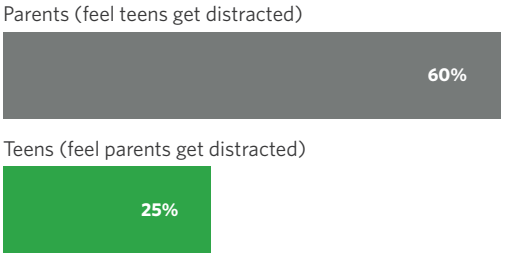


Source of Distraction

Are parents and teens distracted by their devices, and how does that make them feel?

- At least a few times a week, 60 percent of parents feel their teens get distracted by devices and don't pay attention when they are together (see Figure 8).
- 25 percent of parents feel their child is distracted during conversations several times a day.
- At least a few times a week, 25 percent of teens feel their parents get distracted by devices and don't pay attention when they are together.
- 20 percent of teens say they've sometimes felt that their mother or father thinks their mobile device is more important than they are.

FIGURE 8. Feel the other gets distracted by devices and does not pay attention when together, at least a few times a week, parents vs. teens



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Conflict and Worry

Are devices helping or hurting parent-teen relationships?

The majority of families say devices are not hurting parent-child relationships.

- 77 percent of parents feel their teens' use of mobile devices has made no difference or even helped their relationship.
- 94 percent of teens feel their parents' use of mobile devices has made no difference or even helped their relationship.

However, while only 6 percent of teens felt that mobile devices hurt parent-child relationships, 23 percent of parents felt the same, reflecting a significant discrepancy in opinion (see Figure 9).

Are mobile devices a source of conflict between parents and teens?

Nineteen percent of parents and 12 percent of teens say they argue about device use on a daily basis.

How much do parents worry about their children's mobile device use?

Fifty-eight percent of parents worry about their child's use of mobile devices (see Figure 10), with parents of children age 13 to 15 more likely to be worried (69 percent) than parents of children age 16 to 18 (47 percent).

What are the upsides of device use?

- Most (52 percent) Japanese teens believe mobile devices help them learn new skills and prepare for 21st-century jobs (see Figure 11).
- Their parents are more ambivalent; only 25 percent of parents feel that mobile devices help their teens learn new skills.

While the majority of Japanese teens say digital devices aren't hurting family relationships, nearly 1/4 of parents feel they do.

FIGURE 9. Feel that mobile devices have hurt their parent-child relationship, parents vs. teens

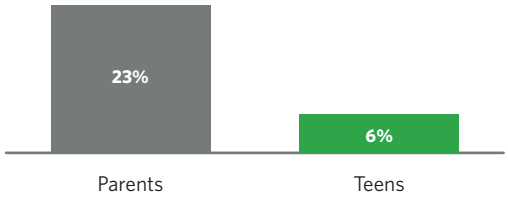


FIGURE 10. Parents who worry about their teens' mobile device use, by age group

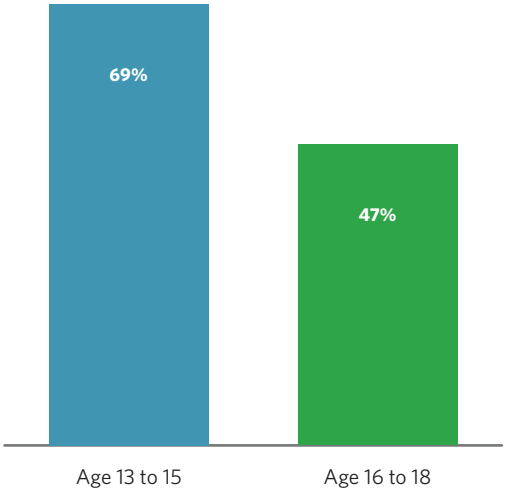
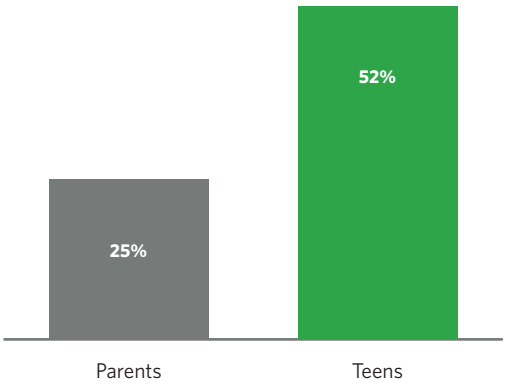


FIGURE 11. Feel that mobile devices help teens learn new skills, parents vs. teens



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Teens are twice as likely as their parents to think their mobile device helps them learn new skills.

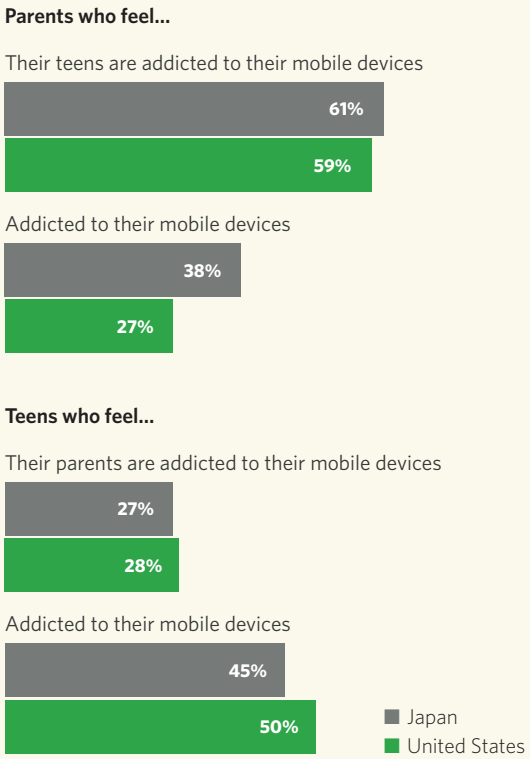
HOW DO JAPANESE PARENTS AND TEENS COMPARE TO U.S. PARENTS AND TEENS*?

TABLE 2. Average daily mobile device use, by activity† Japan vs. United States

Activity	Parents	
	Japan	U.S.
Work	:43	:30
Study	n/a	n/a
Personal activities (nonwork/nonstudy)		
Using social networking sites	:28	:36
Browsing websites	:39	:23
Playing video games	:23	:31
Watching videos	:14	:14
Listening to music	:13	:25
Using messaging apps	:14	not asked
Anything else nonwork related	:02	:25
TOTAL	**2:56**	**3:04**

†*Mobile devices* include smartphones and tablets. The U.S. version of the survey allowed participants to provide their own estimates of time; the Japanese version provided answer options that participants could choose.

FIGURE 12. Parents' and teens' feelings about addiction to mobile devices, Japan vs. United States



Do we feel addicted?

Parents say...

- 61 percent of Japanese parents feel their teens are addicted to their mobile devices (see Figure 12).
- 59 percent of U.S. parents feel their teens are addicted to their mobile devices.
- 38 percent of Japanese parents feel addicted to their mobile devices.
- 27 percent of U.S. parents feel addicted to their mobile devices.

Teens say...

- 27 percent of Japanese teens feel their parents are addicted to their mobile devices.
- 28 percent of U.S. teens feel their parents are addicted to their mobile devices.
- 45 percent of Japanese teens feel addicted to their mobile devices.
- 50 percent of U.S. teens feel addicted to their mobile devices.

*Sources for U.S. data are Common Sense Media (2015). *The Common Sense census: Media use by tweens and teens*. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media.; Common Sense Media (2016). *Dealing with devices: The parent-teen dynamic*. Retrieved August 3, 2017, from https://www.commonsensemedia.org/technology-addiction-concern-controversy-and-finding-balance-infographic.

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How often do we check devices?

- Japan: 38 percent of parents and 48 percent of teens check their devices at least hourly (see Figure 13).
- United States: 69 percent of parents and 78 percent of teens check their devices at least hourly.

Do we feel the need to immediately respond to texts, social networking messages, notifications, etc.?

- Japan: 48 percent of teens and 36 percent of parents feel the need to immediately respond (see Figure 14).
- United States: 72 percent of teens and 48 percent of parents feel the need to immediately respond.

More parents and teens in the U.S. feel a need to "respond immediately" to texts, social networking messages, notifications, etc.

Do we feel we spend too much time on our mobile devices?

- Japan: 52 percent of parents feel their teens spend too much time on their devices; 17 percent of teens agree (see Figure 15).
- United States: 66 percent of parents feel their teens spend too much time on their devices; 52 percent of teens agree.

FIGURE 13. Check their devices at least hourly, Japan vs. United States

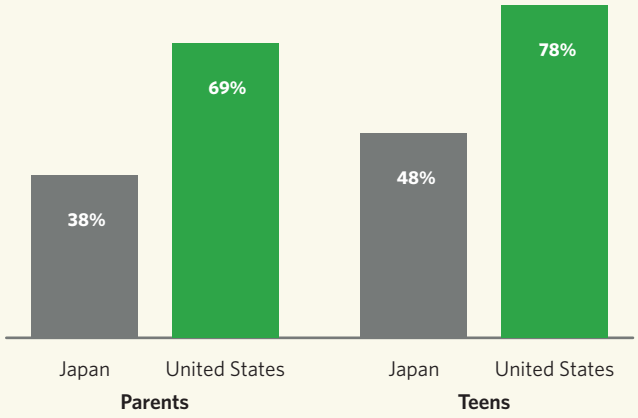


FIGURE 14. Feel the need to "respond immediately" to texts, social networking messages, notifications, etc., Japan vs. United States

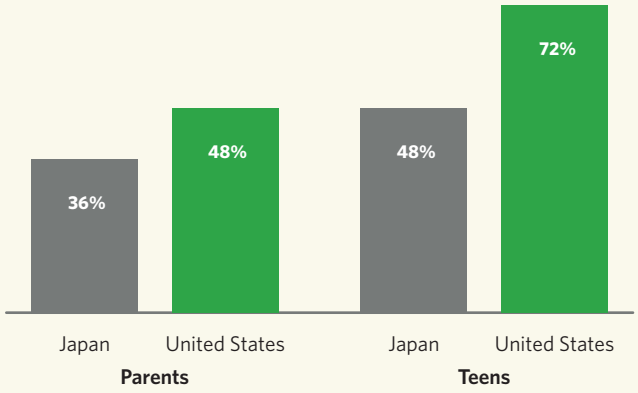
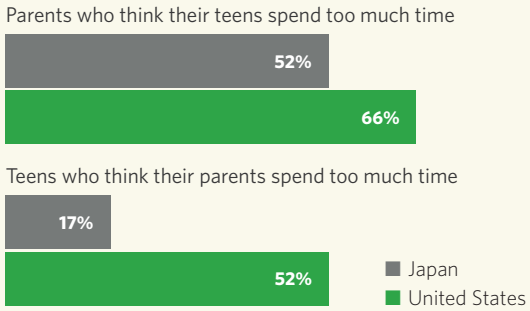


FIGURE 15. Parents' and teens' feelings about time spent on mobile devices, Japan vs. United States



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How often do we try to cut down on use?

- Japan: 4 percent of parents say they very often try to cut down on use (see Figure 16).
- United States: 23 percent of parents say they very often try to cut down on use.

More teens and parents in the U.S. argue daily about device use than in Japan.

Do mobile devices cause conflicts?

- Japan: 19 percent of parents and 12 percent of teens say they argue about device use on a daily basis (see Figure 17).
- United States: 36 percent of parents and 32 percent of teens say they argue about device use on a daily basis.

More Japanese than American parents feel their parent-child relationship has been hurt by mobile device use.

Do mobile devices hurt parent-child relationships?

- Japan: 23 percent of parents feel their teens' use of mobile devices has hurt their relationship; 6 percent of teens feel their parents' use of mobile devices has hurt their relationship (see Figure 18).
- United States: 15 percent of parents feel their teens' use of mobile devices has hurt their relationship; 11 percent of teens feel their parents' use of mobile devices has hurt their relationship.

FIGURE 16. Parents who say they try to cut down on mobile device use "very often," Japan vs. United States

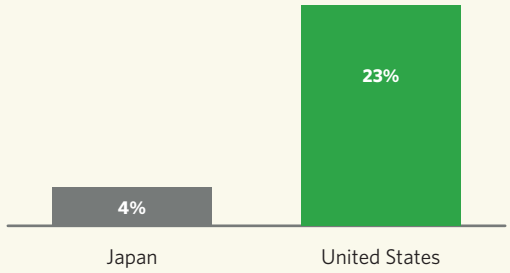


FIGURE 17. Parents who say they argue about device use on a daily basis, Japan vs. United States

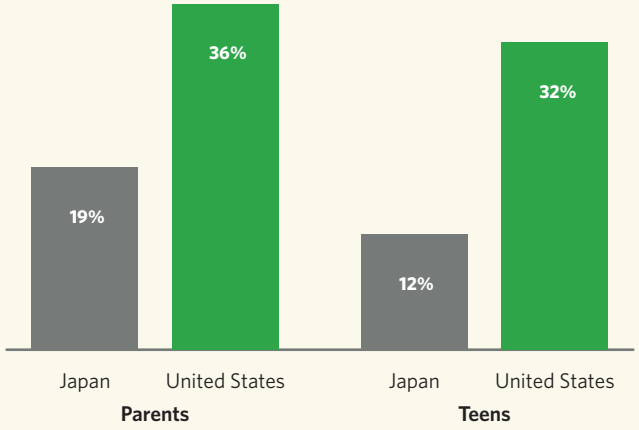
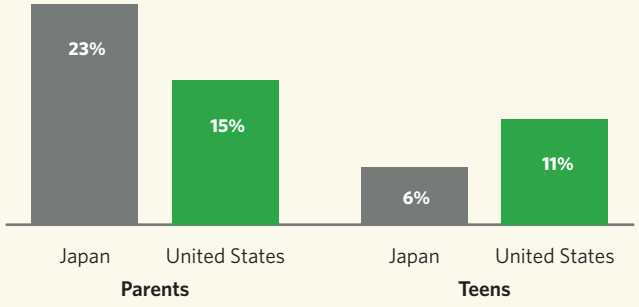


FIGURE 18. Parents and teens who feel that mobile device use has hurt their parent-child relationship, Japan vs. United States



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Are we distracted from each other?

- Japan: At least a few times a week, 60 percent of parents feel their teens get distracted by devices and don't pay attention when they are together. At least a few times a week, 25 percent of teens feel their parents get distracted by devices and don't pay attention when they are together (see Figure 19).
- United States: At least a few times a week, 77 percent of parents feel their teens get distracted by devices and don't pay attention when they are together. At least a few times a week, 41 percent of teens feel their parents get distracted by devices and don't pay attention when they are together.

More than three times the number of Japanese teens — compared to U.S. teens — say they have sometimes felt that their mother or father thinks their mobile device is more important than they are.

Do teens ever feel that their parents think their mobile device is more important than they are?

- Japan: 20 percent of teens say yes (see Figure 20).
- United States: 6 percent of teens say yes.

FIGURE 19. Parents and teens who feel the other is distracted by mobile devices and doesn't pay attention when they are together, Japan vs. United States

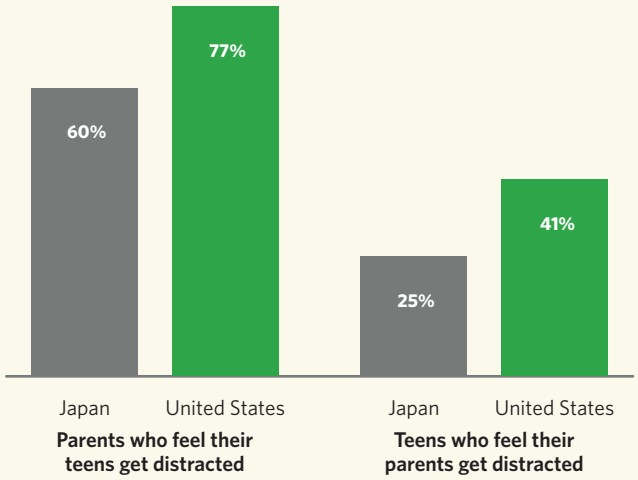
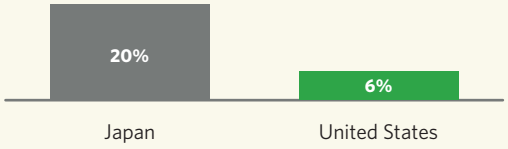


FIGURE 20. Teens who say that they have sometimes felt that their mother or father thinks their mobile device is more important than they are, Japan vs. United States



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CONCLUSION

With this research, we wanted to understand the role digital devices play in the lives of parents and teens in Japan, and compare that to the role of devices in family life in the United States. Based on the observations of hundreds of parents and teens, it is clear that the presence of digital devices and engagement with digital media are playing an increasingly large role in family life. Mobile devices are nearly ubiquitous, connecting people to each other and to a diverse and absorbing media ecosystem. Our cross-cultural research suggests this is our new normal.

We discovered that while many believe that using mobile devices is preparing teens for life in the 21st century, the devices also have become a source of concern, anxiety, and conflict. Many parents and teens report feeling addicted to their devices, and at times distracted from each other.

We want to support today's parents and teens with information to help them integrate technology into their lives in thoughtful and productive ways. Understanding the concerns of families captured in the data here is an important first step — as is recognizing that while the cultural nuances may vary somewhat from country to country, this is a global issue.

We hope this timely, relevant data and its analysis will encourage further conversation, and help parents and teens manage this unprecedented moment in history, as technology rewires our family life. Our goal is to expand our research in the years ahead, to make this a truly global dialogue.

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