

3. Remove the internet from your home altogether and use it only at work.
4. If your employer (or your maternal or paternal duties) requires for you to be always “on call,” then use a designated work phone, and don’t share the work number with anyone else.
5. Replace your smart phone with a so-called “dumb phone.” Indeed, in this upside-down era, many people have discovered that dumb phones are a smart idea.

Addiction is a form of slavery. True freedom is only possible for those who possess *self-dominion*, subjecting their disordered passions to right reason and to divine grace. The choice is yours.

Remember Our Lord’s sacred words:

*“If your right eye causes you to sin,
pluck it out and throw it away;
it is better that you lose one of your members
than that your whole body be thrown
into Hell. And if your right hand causes you
to sin, cut it off and throw it away;
it is better that you lose one of your members
than that your whole body go into Hell.”*

— Mt 5:29-30

Prayer and the Sacraments

What kind of prayer is needed? — The Holy Rosary (which is a meditation on the mysteries of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, as seen through the eyes of His Mother) and at least 30 minutes of Mental Prayer each day.³ Authentic prayer, the kind that transforms, must be “*an intimate conversation between friends; it means conversing frequently and alone with Him who we know loves us*” (St. Teresa of Avila).

Why the Sacraments? — The Sacraments are vessels of grace which Christ entrusted to His Church. When we approach them with humility and faith, Christ comes to the aid of our human weakness. In Confession, Christ washes our sins in His Blood, gives clarity to our mind, and strengthens our will against future temptations. In Holy Communion, Christ nourishes us with Himself and clothes

us with His divine strength. Frequent Confession (ideally once a week) together with frequent Holy Communion (always and only when we have confessed our sins and are in a state of grace) have an unparalleled power to transform the human mind and heart, precisely because it is Christ Himself who works through them. He tells us: “*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing*” (Jn 15:5). And the Apostle Paul says: “*I can do all things in Him who strengthens me*” (Phil 4:13).

Eucharistic Adoration, moreover, is the antithesis of screen addiction. The glowing screen, in itself, is nothing but a series of pixels; it promises a seemingly endless world of delights, but it delivers fleeting, empty pleasures and the chains of addiction. Christ hidden in the Sacred Host, on the other hand, is humble, unassuming, and self-effacing. He makes no outward show of divine glory, yet His Sacred Heart, beating and burning within the Sacred Host, offers enduring delights and authentic freedom to those who truly desire it:

*“I have set before you life and death,
blessing and curse; therefore choose life,
that you and your descendants may live,
loving the Lord your God,
obeying His voice,
and cleaving to Him.”*

— Dt 30 19-20



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— On the Dangers of Screen Addiction —

Doctor Nicholas Kardaras is a clinical psychologist, a university professor, and an acknowledged expert on substance addiction. By the year 2002, he had already worked with numerous troubled youths addicted to heroin, cocaine, and other mind-altering drugs. Yet an experience while on vacation in Greece with his newlywed wife opened his eyes to a new kind of drug, one which he didn’t even know existed. He describes the experience like this:

After the usual stops at Mykonos and Santorini, we decided to take the ferry down to the more rugged island of Crete and hike several hours down the ancient Samaritan Gorge to the remote coastal village of Loutro. It is a magical place: Stunning, sun-drenched Greek beach with laughing bathers splashing around in the clearest blue water; a beautiful, tranquil place that time forgot ... There are no cars, no convenience stores, no TV, no flashing lights — just traditional whitewashed houses and a handful of small waterfront inns and their beachfront tavernas. Loutro is also known as a go-to family destination. The seclusion of the traffic-free village makes it an ideal playground for kids: kayaking, swimming, climbing of rocks, games of tag, leaps into the water — it is a kids’ paradise. During our first day there, after having spent the whole morning at the beach, we stopped by one of the cafés for a frappe. While there, I asked the waiter where the restrooms were and was pointed toward some steep stairs down to a dimly lit, low-ceilinged basement. Once downstairs, I could see an odd glow emanating from a corner in the darkness. Squinting to adjust to the darkened room, I was

able to see the light source: it was Loutro’s anemic version of an Internet café — two old Apple computers on a tiny table in a corner of the depressing cellar. As I looked closer, I could see the dark silhouettes of two pudgy American kids playing video games with their round faces illuminated by screens just inches away from their faces. That’s odd, I thought; one of the world’s most beautiful seascapes, where the local Greek kids were playing from sunup to sundown was just a few feet away, yet these two were holed up in the darkness in the middle of a sunny afternoon. As I chanced into that café a couple more times over the week that we were there, those two kids were always in that basement with their illuminated faces. Not being a parent myself yet, I didn’t think that much about the pudgy kids with the glowing faces and wrote them off, rather judgmentally, I must admit, as probably just the unhealthy children of bad parents. Yet I never forgot the hypnotized expressions of those boys playing in that horrible cellar while paradise was just over their heads. Slowly, as with the *drip, drip, drip* of a faucet, I began to realize that the hypnotized, glassy-eyed stares were spreading; like a virtual scourge, the Glow Kids were multiplying.¹

As the years rolled by, Dr. Kardaras encountered more and more of those zombie-like stares, the result of a new drug that entered not through a needle or a pill ... but through the eyes.

Doctor Kardaras wasn’t the first or the only researcher to recognize the problem. A growing list of neuroscientists, psychologists and other researchers were sounding the warning bell about the harmful effects of video games, social media, and other forms of screen addiction. Some of these researchers describe the phenomenon with terms like “electronic heroin” and “digital cocaine.” They’re NOT exaggerating. Those glowing screens produce a kind of sensory overload, which triggers the production of high quantities of dopamine, a kind of “happy” chemical which inebriates the brain. The more we throw ourselves into those glowing screens, the more dopamine shoots into the brain, and the more we become dependent on them.

¹ Kardaras, Nicholas, *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction is Hijacking Our Kids — And How to Break the Trance*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016, pp. 2-3. Quoted with permission of the author. See also the author’s ample bibliography.

³ For an excellent introduction to this form of prayer, see the *Golden Treatise on Mental Prayer*, by St. Peter of Alcantara.

Some nations have already diagnosed the problem. China, for instance, identified “Internet Addiction Disorder” as its number one public health crisis, afflicting more than 20 million teens. South Korea, as of the publication of Dr. Kardaras’ book in 2016, had opened 400 tech addiction rehab centers. They also distributed a handbook to every student, parent, and teacher, which warned them of the dangers of screen addiction.²

Here in the US, rather, politicians seem convinced that the best way to revamp our public schools is to furnish them with more and better computers. They claim that the computers are educational tools, which will help students to excel academically. It’s also a convenient way to lighten the load on educators, who do little more than monitor the room while the students sit mesmerized before the glowing screens.

Researchers have found NO evidence that computers will help students to do better in school or in the work force. There’s a *mountain* of evidence, rather, that device addiction is actually stunting the proper development of their brains. It can also trigger the onset of schizophrenia and other forms of mental illness.

You can read all this in Dr. Kardaras’ book, *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction is Hijacking Our Kids — And How to Break the Trance*. I urge you all to read it.

Do we even need clinical research, though, to tell us these devices are having a harmful effect on our children? Fifty or sixty years ago, the city streets were filled with children playing. They played stickball, basketball, hide-and-seek. Today, the city streets are empty. There are two reasons for this: 1) There are less children to begin with thanks to the culture of death in this era of abortion and contraception; and 2) the few children who do live in the cities are all huddled in their rooms playing video games.

When I was a child, I enjoyed family visits with my cousins. We talked, played games, and ran around outside: in short, we were friends, and we interacted as friends. Today, if you put a half dozen teenagers in a room, chances are that within five minutes, each one will be zoned out like a zombie in front of his own glowing screen.

The federal government has an agency called the Food and Drug Administration, or FDA. The FDA is far from infallible. Back in the 1990s, they promoted the “Food Pyr-

amid,” which ruined the health of millions of Americans. Nevertheless, there ought to be some kind of agency which carries out the FDA’s function of evaluating the things we ingest or otherwise put into our system. The FDA evaluates new drugs before they go on the market, and decides on recommended dosage, how frequently the drug should be taken, and indications on how the drug will react with other medications.

The glowing screens managed to bypass the FDA and its regulating process. They slipped through undetected because no one even realized they were a drug. Consequently, we have to devise our own set of rules.

I’ll give you two sets of recommended rules: one set of rules for parents to apply with their children and another set for us adults to regulate our own use of those mesmerizing, mind-altering screens.

Rules for Parents

1. *Do not give your child a smart phone, tablet, or any other device of his own.* I don’t care how often the child pleads with you. I don’t care how many of your child’s friends have those devices, and what kind of peer pressure may be involved. If you give your child a device of his own, he’ll be able to use it whenever you’re not looking, and he’ll be addicted within months or even weeks. Children have little sense of boundaries or self-restraint. They don’t know how much is too much. That’s why you don’t give a bottle of whiskey to a six-year-old or to a twelve-year-old, and that’s why you shouldn’t give them glowing toys which are just as addictive as whiskey.
2. *Never, ever use these devices as a baby-sitter.* This is the great temptation for parents today. You’re busy. You’re tired. You just want a little time for yourself in order to rest, catch up on some reading or



housework, or even to pray. However tempting it may be, you have to consider the cost and the risks involved. Ask yourself: “Would I give my child a shot of heroin just so I could get a little rest?”

3. If you have devices of your own, you should observe these additional rules:
 - › *Don’t let your children know the password.* If they already know the password, then change it.
 - › *Don’t ever allow a child to use the device when you’re not in the room.*
 - › *Keep the device under lock and key at night and whenever you’re not at home.* Remember that children are crafty, and your angelic little children will lose their wings as soon as they get a taste of tech addiction.

Then there’s the question: “How much time should I allow my child to spend on the computer each day?” An hour? Half an hour? Let’s reformulate the question: “How much time should I allow my child free access to the liquor cabinet each day?” If you give him half an hour each day, he could be an alcoholic within months.

With regard to children, we must remember a basic principle: Just as “*Necessity is the mother of invention,*” so too, “*Boredom is the mother of creativity.*” When children are bored, they find things to do. They build things. They invent stories and games. They interact with their siblings and friends. Children NEED boredom as the privileged space where their character can develop and flourish. The best way to stunt the proper development of a child’s imagination is to put a glowing device in his hands.

Rules for Adults

1. *Use the device as little as possible.*
2. *Never use a device to self-medicate, as an alleged cure for boredom or loneliness.* The devil loves impulsivity and one of the best ways to give him sway over your mind and heart is by surfing and scrolling randomly through his digital domain.
3. *Turn off the audible notifications on your device.* Otherwise you’ll be like a marionette that jumps every time someone jiggles the strings.
4. When you have to use the device, follow these additional rules:
 - › *Never get on the internet without praying first.* It



could be a prayer to Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. Michael, your Guardian Angel.

- › *Always have a clear set of objectives before you get on the internet.* Imagine that you’re a bomber pilot preparing for a mission. You have three bombs and three targets. You say a prayer and then enter enemy territory. You drop Bomb A on Target A, Bomb B on Target B, Bomb C on Target C. Then you immediately pull out, because you know that if you linger in enemy territory, sooner or later you WILL get shot down.
- › *Based on your list of objectives, set a timer.* When the timer goes off, close whatever you’re doing and get out of the net.
- › *Say a prayer after your bombing mission:* a prayer of thanksgiving if you observed the rules faithfully, or an Act of Contrition if you did not. If you didn’t observe the rules, make sure to mention it in your next Confession.

For some people, the above set of rules, combined with *prayer* and *frequenting the Sacraments*, may be sufficient to effectively avoid internet addiction, or to break the addiction if they’re already junkies.

Other people may need to add stricter measures, such as the following:

1. *Limit your internet use to set times of the day.* For instance, you could check your messages once after each meal, and have only one designated time each day for responding to messages.
2. *Avoid using your phone for jobs that can be done without it.* Use a wristwatch to tell time. Memorize the routes that you drive most often instead of always using the GPS. Use a print dictionary or cookbook rather than looking things up online.

² Cf Kardaras, p. 4.