

Digital detox for a day? Make it possible

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MUMBAI: SP Jain Institute of Management and Research (SPJIMR) in Andheri recently highlighted the need to reduce students' over-dependence on smartphones by calling for a 'digital detox day' on campus.

Students and staff were asked to switch off their mobile phones and laptops for one day and connect with each other without the use of technology.

The institute disconnected their campus WiFi for 10 hours and encouraged everyone to participate in discussions, sports activities and karaoke sessions.

"The challenge to refrain from using any form of digital technology is a step in the right direction. We could always debate on finding better alternatives, but the problem of smartphone addiction is only going to worsen unless we act now," said Dhruv Bholra, a stu-

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dent of the institute.

"Technology is a positive force in our lives. However, many of us know there are aspects of addiction which intrude into our ability to have a deep and meaningful conversation and connection and can create excessive dependence on devices. The detox helps to make us aware of this dependence," said Ranjan Banerjee, dean, SPJIMR.

Taking a break from technology is a concept that city colleges have been adopting slowly.

The management of Matunga's RA Podar College called for their first digital detox day in January last year. "We

didn't implement a total crack-down on mobile phones, and requested students and teachers to keep their mobile phones at home on some days. It was a pleasant surprise when we saw students readily wanting to stay away from technology for a day," said Sobhana Vasudevan, principal.

Psychologist Seema Hingorany calls digital dependence an "addiction" that most students are prone to, and which also affects all strata of society. "We see someone as young as a seven-year-old to someone in their forties who cannot survive without their phones or laptops, and most

don't even realise it's an addiction," she said.

"Of late, many parents have agreed to sit for family-therapy sessions where both parents and children encourage each other to keep away from the internet, especially social media. It is important for educational institutes as well as parents to draw the line, and call for time-off."

Experts said youngsters behave aggressively or even resort to self-harm if parents snatch their devices away. "Youngsters form this compulsive behaviour for many reasons—loneliness being the main one. Many also use social media to feel wanted by peers," said Dr Manoj Kumar Sharma, who runs the Service for Healthy Use of Technology (SHUT) clinic.

Located at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in Bengaluru, SHUT helps deal with technology-based addictions.