



COULD YOU GO PHONE-FREE FOR A WHOLE WEEKEND AT ADULT SUMMER CAMP?

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If the persistence of the little red dot on the top corner of the email, Facebook or any app on your smartphone has become a point of stress, a digital detox might be in order. According to 2017 data from Media Technology Monitor, the average Canadian spends 24.5 hours a week on the internet, with 18- to 34-year-olds bending the neck and raising the thumbs for an additional 10 hours.

Industry experts agree: We are obsessed with our tech.

Larry Rosen, professor emeritus of psychology at California State University, Dominguez Hills, has been studying the impact that technology has on the brain and psyche for 34 years.

"We can't seem to put it down. All of the data show that the vast majority of smartphone users are accessing it for many, many hours a day," he says. "Our latest data, which is a year old now, shows that the young adults, college students who are in their mid-twenties, are using their smartphone 262 minutes a day on the average." That is an increase of 19 per cent year over year, he says, and while Mr. Rosen is still studying the 2018 data, he estimates that the average time spent on cellphones will increase to somewhere between 280 to 300 minutes a day.

The heavy use of tech devices and obsession over social media is something that Negin Sairafi and Hima Batavia recognize is an issue impacting Canadians. Ms. Sairafi and Ms. Batavia are two of the eight founders of Reset, a tech-free summertime getaway in Southern Ontario where participants put down their phones for an entire weekend in order to reconnect with themselves, their peers and their surroundings.

We were inspired by things that were happening to the south of us in the United States. We saw a lot of adult summer camps for grown-ups, and thought that we could bring something to Canada that had this get-off-the grid, detox component, as well as a play component, to it," says Ms. Batavia.

There are a few guidelines for attendees of Reset – not rules, but principles that set the tone for the three-night excursion. These include no smartphones or cellphones of any kind, no cameras, no work talk and no real names.

Upon arrival, each person at Reset chooses a nickname as a way to embrace a different identity and be imaginative while away from the outside world. The first year, attendees took a Last Selfie, posing with the person standing next to them, a final snap before dropping their device into a plastic Ziploc bag and handing it over to a staffer for safe keeping. These are just a few of the ways that Reset weaves its ethos of play, being present and making a profound connection throughout the weekend.

While Reset was originally branded as an adult summer camp when it first launched in 2015, it has since morphed into something more (though the lack of technology remains a core principle).

“Ultimately we found that the idea of a camp for adults was a trend,” says Ms. Sairafi.

“But now, what we truly are is this experience of an alternative reality where people can drop into a completely different state and become a different person for a few days, or look at things from a different perspective and maybe make different decisions and feel differently about things.”

This summer marks the fourth year for Reset, which will take place at Camp White Pine in Haliburton, Ont., from Aug. 30 to Sept. 2. Four hundred guests are expected to flock to the cabins along Hurricane Lake, an increase from last year’s 250 attendees.

Programming for the weekend is divided into eight categories, which Reset calls “tracks,” including traditional camp activities in the Sports and Games track, as well as more alternative experiences, such as Soundtrack, an exploration into audio and how it relates to well-being, and Sex and Sensuality, a dive into intimacy with oneself and others. Attendees participate in the tracks that are of most interest to them, like a real-life choose-your-own-adventure.

While Reset recognizes the need for a technology and social-media detox, Mr. Rosen warns that abruptly cutting out digital communication for an entire weekend might not be effective.

“It doesn’t teach people how to deal with [their technology obsession or overuse] when they go home,” says Mr. Rosen. “The problem doesn’t disappear just because you go away for a weekend. In fact, it gets exacerbated because as soon as you come home from camp, and you’re back into the now, you have 50 posts from people on social media that you need to catch up with. Your world still exists while you’re away.”

Instead, Mr. Rosen suggests easing into the detox, starting with 30 minutes or even two hours of phone-free time, rather than going cold turkey for an entire three days.

He also recommends designated “tech time” throughout the day, a concept in which a predetermined amount of time (to check e-mail, apps or even sports scores) is agreed upon by everyone involved. This can work in the home, for instance at a family dinner table, in a classroom, or even in a camp setting.

For Reset, the crux of the weekend has always been about “turning it off to tune back in,” as Ms. Sairafi says, and its founders are convinced of its efficacy. Ms. Sairafi and Ms. Batavia hope that attendees will leave their carefully curated program with a greater sense of how, when and why they use their devices.

“For many, it’s been a long time since they have participated in activities that are not disrupted or interrupted by tech,” says Ms. Sairafi. “But when you acquaint yourself with the joy of profound presence, it is easier to make that choice again.”