



Girl Scout Spreads Awareness on Digital Media Addiction
Madeline Cooley earns Gold Award for project, "Digital Media Minimalism"

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Ventura, CA —

Madeline Cooley, a current senior at Westlake High School, was well aware of the amount of time her peers spent looking at their cellphones. According to recent [studies](#), half of teenagers say they're addicted to their devices and feel like they spend too much time on them. With the goal to build awareness of how excessive digital media usage can have a negative impact on one's mental and social well-being, Madeline launched her Gold Award project, Digital Media Minimalism.

"Excessive device users are unaware of the harmful effects on their mental and social development," Madeline said. "My Gold Award project raised awareness on the science of addiction and explained why we crave our phones. Whenever one thinks about their phone, their brain releases a feel-good neurotransmitter known as dopamine, which urges the user to pick up their device. Social media feeds off of our desire for human connection and makes one feel more accepted. Users feel they are unable to reduce their screen time because they will experience a fear of missing out."

Madeline interviewed Dr. Jesse Esqueda, a psychologist at Engage Therapy in Thousand Oaks, to find out how long it takes to decrease an individual's digital media addiction. The two settled on the span of a month to reduce device usage, with Dr. Esqueda stressing the importance of incentives to motivate one's decrease in screen time. She also sought the expertise of Margie Moreno, Head of Latam Originals for YouTube Red, on how to create videos that captivate an audience. She used Margie's techniques to create a [documentary](#) video that addresses the issues of digital media addiction and methods to help control it.

Starting with her high school tennis team of 26 girls, Madeline created a one-month challenge to reduce digital media usage by controlling the amount of time spent on apps. She presented to her teammates, asked them to set daily device time goals and app limits, and had the girls fill out pre- and post- surveys surrounding the challenge. The team sent Madeline their screen time reports once a week throughout the month, with the individual with the most reduced screen time receiving a prize.



The results of her post-challenge survey revealed that participants found it helpful to turn off app notifications, utilize the "Do Not Disturb" feature, set app limits, and delete addicting apps to stay off their devices. They also reported a decrease in the amount of time it took to complete homework assignments and a higher overall feeling of well-being during the challenge. Over the one-month challenge, individuals saw a decrease in their device usage by 30-50%.

In addition, she presented to other Westlake High School students in the school amphitheater. Students were encouraged to sign a pledge wall with the goal to decrease device usage. Madeline also created informational brochures that were distributed to students at her presentation, as well as Student District Representatives and other members of the school district.

"Devices and social media are a big part of our global culture and many people suffer from digital media addiction," Madeline said. "I am a confident public speaker who is passionate about reducing this problem and a courageous leader who is determined to make a difference. I made it my mission to bring awareness to my community's digital media addiction."

Madeline was able to fund her project entirely through babysitting money that she had earned. She used the funds to purchase the printed brochures circulated through the Conejo Unified School District, as well as digital minimalism goodie bags for the participants of her challenge.

March 6th is the National Day of Unplugging, a day that encourages individuals to step away from their digital devices, unplug, relax, reflect, be active, visit the outdoors, and connect with loved ones! Madeline encourages others to redirect their attention to other activities, such as socializing with peers or playing a sport. We encourage all of our Girl Scouts to take Madeline's challenge today!

For more information about the Gold Award and how Girl Scouts are creating positive change within their communities, visit [here](#).

About Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast

Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast serves over 8,800 girls across six counties and is committed to making the Girl Scout Leadership Experience available to girls in ways that impact their lives both in the moment and into the future. Girls participate in troops, individual projects, council events, day camps, resident camps and more. A variety of leadership, outdoor skills, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) based programs and events provide girls with opportunities to learn and explore in fun and informative ways. To join or volunteer in Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara or Ventura County, visit: <http://www.girlscoutscoc.org>.

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