



Syntropic
Foundation

"Uproot digital weeds.
Rebuild meaningful lives."

Presenter: Alexander Chen

Stop Mental Automation

February 19, 2026

Blyth Academy Downsview Park
Ontario, CA

I'm Alex!



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- I **don't** play video games.
- I **don't** use TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, etc.
- I am not insane.





“Digital Media Misuse”

Digital media usage (scrolling, gaming, streaming) behavior that creates **harm** to oneself or others.



I'm talking to you.



I'm talking to you.

Because it's your decision.



Today I want to share:

- Why I made my decision.



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- My experience fighting digital media misuse.



Today I want to share:

- Why I made my decision.
- My experience fighting digital media misuse.

→ Your role in fixing this problem.



This Talk:

Part 1: The Problem

Part 2: What We Can Do



Part 1: The Problem



Canadian Youth Digital Media Usage

[“]...teens should limit their **recreational screen time to two hours per day.**

...

only **28% of youth** (12 to 17 years of age) **living in Canada** **meet the screen time recommendation** (down from 31%)[”]

Statistics Canada's Canadian Health Measures Survey - Reporting From Participation.com Blog



Health continues to decline...

...while digital media consumption
continues to rise.



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How do they make money?



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How do they make money?

→ They get people to watch ads and buy things.



Producers have an **incentive**
to **make** people watch **more** videos
and play **more** games.



2016: Experiments begin in China with the short-video media app “Douyin”.

- In 1 year, captured **100 million** users, rising to the top of Chinese social media platforms.



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2. Accuracy: personalized content streams made content more attractive to individual users, increasing desire for more.
3. Content: feeds were controlled to promote usage-increasing behaviours.



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2020: Platforms begin widespread adoption of “shorts feeds” e.g. Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts.



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- They're the natural effects on a person's perception of real life when constantly exposed to a fake, unrealistic digital world made only of highlights and entertainment.
- Usage is designed to develop harmful behavior habits, by destroying attention span, memory, and the ability to think.
- Dangerous exposure and predators e.g. cyberbullying, doxxing, impersonation, deep-fakes.



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TikTok **knew** all this, yet still pushed its platform to youth and adults.



It's the same with video games.



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[“]to succeed with a Free-To-Play game you need to aggressively target your customers' weaknesses. “If you make a grindy game, you can charge the slothful to speed up their levelling process. Put PvP in your game and sell combat advantages to rake in the cash from the wrathful. Offer fancy hats and dresses to exploit your users' vanity.” ... “We have to bring them {the players} in and keep them addicted and make them keep playing.” Game design is not about game design ... **it's about business.**”]



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- Technology itself isn't bad. Technology can be used for good.
- But technology often isn't used for good. It's abused, used as a snare for producers to trap users online.
- “It only takes 35 minutes to get addicted to TikTok” - we have to watch out for harmful platforms and content.



Part 2: What We Can Do



My Decision



My Decision

- I couldn't continue to indulge in these things.



My Decision

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- I was tired of perpetual, fake, simulated excitement.



My Decision

- I couldn't continue to indulge in these things.
- I was tired of perpetual, fake, simulated excitement.
- I wanted something better - to use my time and energy to be productive.



We don't rely on digital media to live.



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How could that time be used for something better?



Your Decision



Your Decision

- To be the best you can be, every little thing matters.



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- People's brains don't fully mature until their late ~30s
 - Bad habits, harmful behaviors, and damage are easiest to develop during this time.



Your Decision

- To be the best you can be, every little thing matters.
- People's brains don't fully mature until their late ~30s
 - Bad habits, harmful behaviors, and damage are easiest to develop during this time.
- Don't waste the time you have: use it to develop and grow.



Two Recommendations For You



1. Self Examination

- Try to go **one** week without digital media
 - If all is too hard, just pick **one** e.g. YouTube, gaming, scrolling
 - Screen time for schoolwork, learning, etc. is ok.



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 - Take note of your behavior - if/when you fall, how it happens, how the urge arises



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- See how much influence digital media has over you.
 - Take note of your behavior - if/when you fall, how it happens, how the urge arises
- This isn't restricting yourself: it's liberation from digital media.



2. Moderation Defenses

Some (not exhaustive):

1. Put away the device an hour before you sleep. Read a book, write on paper, do something not on the device - blue light disrupts circadian rhythm and hurts sleep quality.
2. Stop using a phone or screened device while eating / when not appropriate. It draws blood away from where it's needed, harming digestion. Take quiet time to rest rather than fill up every little bit with screen time.
3. Always set time limits. Respect your timer & parents when they tell you to take a break. Have something to keep you accountable from going on for too long.
4. Try to have one day free from digital media each week. Similar in essence to a “detox”, take time to rest in order to break mental automation. Tell your friends you're having a break day so they don't bother you (or take one all off together).
5. Find a replacement for digital media. When you feel urges to pull out the phone or open up games / social media, try to turn to something more productive and beneficial.



Our Mission

Syntropic Foundation helps people outgrow digital media misuse and rebuild responsible, meaningful lives.





"Uproot digital weeds.
Rebuild meaningful lives."

Q&A

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