

## If no one texts you back tonight, maybe it's not you: National Day of Unplugging starts at sundown

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If you are reading this article on your phone, it's almost time to put the device down.

National Day of Unplugging kicks off Friday night in an effort to teach people that it is possible — and maybe even enjoyable — to take a break from their beloved mobile devices.

The initiative, now in its 10th year, lasts from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, mirroring the Jewish sabbath. The sabbath connection was intentional, said Tanya Schevitz, spokeswoman for New York-based Reboot, the Jewish nonprofit that launched the initiative. National Day of Unplugging is all about rest.

"When we started this, the iPhone was just coming into popular use and I don't think anyone could really imagine what life would be like in today's world, where you have your digital devices with you everywhere," she said. "We've sort of reached a tipping point where people don't know how to take a break."

Seventy-seven percent of Americans own a smartphone, up from 35 percent in 2011, according to a 2018 report from Pew Research Center. And those smartphones have practically become a new body part. Americans check their phone on average 52 times per day — more than ever before, according to research from Deloitte.



Tech companies have acknowledged that people's device dependence is a problem. Apple rolled out tools last year that let users better track their usage, and block notifications during certain hours. Google created similar capabilities.

Critics say the answer to people's overuse of technology shouldn't be more technology, but the issue was seemingly hard for the tech giants to ignore. A 2017 study linked severe depression and suicide attempts to the rise of smartphones. Another study concluded mobile technology addiction is connected to anxiety and depression among college-aged students.

To be clear, Reboot does not believe that technology is evil, Schevitz said.

"Technology has amazing benefits that do so much for us in today's world. It's just the balance is so important," she said. "We've lost the balance."

More than two dozen organizations or businesses throughout Chicago plan events aimed at getting people to disconnect, including co-working firm WeWork and the training center at comedy theater Second City.

Once Second City students walk through the doors of their comedy classes Friday night, it's no phones for them — even during breaks, said Basia Sroka, marketing assistant for the Second City Training Center.

Employees also are being encouraged to stay away from their phones for a while and see what treasures await without the distractions. After all, it's not that far from what goes down at most of the comedy school's improvisation classes, Sroka said.

"That's what you do," she said.

"You put away your phone and you very much do activities when you're in the present moment, and you're connecting with other people."



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