

Taming Technology: Parenting the Online Child

Pocket Reference

Spring 2019

Have a balanced approach to using media and technology for your family that is thoughtful and intentional.

- Focus on a single task when called for and not multitasking in educational, work, or social contexts.
- While teens do a lot of online socializing, face-to-face communication is important to support cultivating rich social relationships.
- Parents and other caring adults can help youth to manage media by modeling balanced media habits themselves.
- Co-engaging with media, discussing media-related best practices, strategies, and ethical dilemmas, and setting limits around how, when, and where to use media, parents can act as “media mentors.”

Managing your family’s technology is no different from how you manage any other limit that needs to be set or establishing any expectation.

- **Identify family values:** this is not only what you want to teach and instill in your children but how you want to do it. It’s the foundation for thoughtful and consistent parenting. If your decisions about how and when your family uses technology are rooted in this foundation, it will be easier to remain consistent in your expectations.
- **Communicate values** and why to your family. This is important to help your child understand the reasons for rules, limits and expectations. When you’re clear about values, you are better able to be firm and consistent. Your child needs this consistency to develop the ability to learn and know what is expected of them. It helps them learn self-regulation and to make good choices.
- When setting limits, **pick your spot** – meaning identify for yourself the most important issues and how you will respond to the inevitable time when your child tests those limits. This also keeps emotions out of the consequences: the issue is with the behavior or action, not with the child. --; family meeting?
- No one is perfect and we learning from our mistakes through the **consequences**. This is the opportunity for child to learn self control, self discipline and to develop the ability to make good choices--because your child knows what are your expectations. Don’t forget to acknowledge when your child makes a good choice, especially if it was a hard one.
- Keep the conversation going. This is an ongoing process; you’ll need to regularly restate your expectations, how and why these connect to what matters to you and what your family stands for.

There are **tools** to help you and your family stick to what you’ve decided should be your “policy” about how you use technology. Remember, a healthy media diet balances three things: what kids do, how much time they spend doing it, and whether their content choices are age-appropriate.

- Make a family contract (positive parenting) if your child is clear about values and what you expect of them, easier for them to know what you would want them to do.
- There are parental controls that help you set up “guard-rails” for how and when your family uses technology. Common Sense Media maintains an up-to-date guide on their website:
<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/parents-ultimate-guide-to-parental-controls>.

Internet Addiction is real. Like other addictions, when being plugged-in becomes a compulsive behavior. These two articles present the facts, provide a quiz that can start the conversation in your family (with teens and other adults) in an approachable way.

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/quiz/2013/oct/07/are-you-an-internet-addict-quiz>
https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/ppmndm/i-took-the-internet-addiction-quiz-and-i-won-371

Additional resources including article on parenting, listings of community organizations and resources and an events calendar can be found at the [Supporting Parents Essex NJ website](http://www.spenj.org): www.spenj.org

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Tips for “Taming Technology” and finding ways to change ingrained and reflexive habits:

- **Buy an actual alarm clock.** Using an actual alarm clock will help you stop picking up your smartphone first thing in the morning and breaks the habit of browsing online before even getting up from bed.
- **Go back to pen and paper.** Find a pocket size planner to carry with you.
- **Cover up or stay away from wall outlets.** Try to charge your devices in a separate room other than your bedroom in order to avoid constantly picking it up.
- **Get outside without your phone.** Very few things are so urgent that they can't wait for an hour or two.
- **Go back to the classics,** listen to the radio, vinyl records, or CDs to avoid getting lost in the subspace that is your iPhone or other smart device.
- **Find activities that connect you to people or don't require you use your device.** Don't bring your phone to the gym, take a yoga or fitness class, playing a sport at a local recreational center, join a book group or schedule a regular meet-up with friends and agree that your time together is a device-free hour, Unplug your land line, turn off your devices and give yourself some time just to breathe and meditate.

Dig deeper:

There's Worrying New Research About Kids' Screen Time and Their Mental Health

<http://time.com/5437607/smartphones-teens-mental-health>

How does screen time affect kids' brains? The first results of a landmark study are alarming. The National Institutes of Health recently began a \$300-million study to examine the effects of screen time on developing brains.

<https://bigthink.com/mind-brain/screen-time-nih-study-60-minutes>

Watch the **60 Minutes** episode

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/groundbreaking-study-examines-effects-of-screen-time-on-kids-60-minutes/>

An interesting info-graphic about how parents and teens see media use differently. Look at it together with your family and talk about what each family member thinks about it.

<https://www.common sense media.org/technology-addiction-concern-controversy-and-finding-balance-infographic>

Parents: Reject Technology Shame: The advantages of helping kids learn to navigate the digital world, rather than shielding them from it

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/11/why-parents-shouldnt-feel-technology-shame/414163/>

A real life situation: **Dear Therapist: I Looked Through My Daughter's Phone, and I Didn't Like What I Saw**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2019/02/what-do-i-do-when-my-daughter-gets-explicit-text/581818/>

You may not be a digital native, but you can talk like one by using this digital glossary.

<https://www.common sense.org/education/digital-glossary>

On YouTube: What you Need to Know about Internet Addiction

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=vOSYmLER664

Net Addiction Anon organization <http://netaddictionanon.org/>

How to Teach Your Kids About the Brain:

<https://www.heysigmund.com/how-to-teach-kids-about-the-brain-laying-strong-foundations-for-emotional-intelligence-by-dr-hazel-harrison/>

“Why Videogames Trigger the Nightly Meltdown”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fi6596_RUNQ

“How to Stop Your Smartphone from Hurting Your Health”

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_stop_your_smartphone_from_hurting_your_health

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