

Taming Technology

The start of a new year is a time when many people make resolutions. Often, within a month or two those resolutions are sheepishly neglected. Now that you and your family are back in a routine after the busy holiday season, it's a great time to reset everyone's tech time.

Just because you may need your child to work the remote or your tween rolls their eyes when you ask them about Facebook and you remember that Facebook is sooo yesterday, you shouldn't throw in the towel, put in your ear buds and settle for feeling uneasy about the latest app your child may or may not be using.

Managing your family's technology use is important for several reasons. Your child's brain development is impacted ([click here to read more](#)); social media savvy is part of twenty-first century social skills; and figuring out how to keep your family active and healthy while they're plugged-in is a challenge that won't be going away ([click here for ideas on encouraging your family to develop life-long health habits](#)).

How then do parents guide their children's use of electronics when it is common to see smart phones and tablets in the hands of many children and it can be challenging for many high school students to manage without access to a computer.

Take the time to review guidelines for children's media use ([like those of the American Academy of Pediatrics here](#)) and to map out for yourself how your family members, including yourself, need to use technology.

It may make sense to try to log everyone's use – sometimes just facing the facts (how much time is spent looking down at a smart phone, how many text messages are sent and received in a day or how many hours are spent in a sedentary way in front of a screen) is enough of a wake-up call to change behaviors and routines.

Take time to think about your family's values and goals. Think about what habits you want to cultivate in your children. Use a family meeting as a time to engage, as a family, in thinking about what is gained by having a cell phone “corral” where everyone in the family parks their devices during dinner; about the life-long benefits of being physically active every day; talk about the importance of a good night's sleep, and that putting away devices a hour before turning out the lights contributes to a restful night.

Getting your family's online time or video gaming under control may seem daunting, but it is like setting any other limit. You need to think about your family's values, set and enforce the limits and boundaries that fit into those values, and model appropriate behavior. You can use a tool like [The Family Media Plan](#) to customize your family's guidelines on screen time.

Don't skip the step of learning about how your child uses social media and games. Become your child's mentor in navigating the complicated life of a "digital native." (Check out [The Mentorship Manifesto](#) to learn more.)

- Sit down, pick up a controller and play. Don't just lecture your tween on their phone becoming a body part.
- Get past their hostility and ask them what they like about Snap-chat (or whatever App has taken its place) and what they don't like. For them "social media" really is social, it is how they engage with their peers, so the emotional issues of adolescence are part of their electronic lives.
- Explore what makes them happy and what is hurtful and upsetting. Start a conversation about what they are feeling and how their actions can change that:
- Help them to understand that the reason their friend may not have responded to the dozen text messages your child sent may have nothing to do with how much they are liked,
- Encourage them to think twice before sending a sarcastic reply to a friend or forward an inappropriate photograph and to consider how their words might be misunderstood.
- Don't forget to help them fix it when a message they sent blows up in their face; help them understand however fleeting the message may seem in cyber-space, the hurt caused by words can last a lifetime.
- No matter how uncomfortable talking with your teen about "sexting" may make you both feel; it is an important conversation to have.

There are dangers out there. Teach yourself and your family to own your cyber-identities. Take steps together to protect your information. The half-life of photos online is radioactive; it doesn't go away and can haunt someone forever. Model good habits by asking your child permission to post their photograph on your Facebook page ([click here for a great article explaining why](#)).

The next step: put down the tablet now; log-off the computer; or turn the alerts on your phone and put it away. You can follow up on the links in this article later. As one media expert puts it: Stop Texting, Enjoy Life. Now.

Embedded Links in this article:

Impact on children's brain development: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mental-wealth/201402/gray-matters-too-much-screen-time-damages-the-brain>

Keeping your family active:
https://www.healthiergeneration.org/live_healthier/get_moving/

American Academy of Pediatrics parents' resources, including guidelines for children's media use:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/AAP-Announces-New-Recommendations-for-Childrens-Media-Use.aspx>

Family Media Plan: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>

[The Mentorship Manifesto](#) proposed by Devorah Heitner

Why I Started Asking Permission Before Sharing My Kids' Photos on Facebook by Heidi Stevens: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/stevens/ct-ask-kids-permission-for-facebook-pix-balancing-0904-20160904-column.html>

Looking to learn more?

Books

Richard Freed: [Wired Child: Reclaiming Childhood in a Digital Age](#)

Lori Getz: [The Tech Savvy User's Guide to the Digital World](#)

Devorah Heitner: [Screenwise: Helping Kids Thrive \(and Survive\) in Their Digital World](#). Heitner's website includes [the Mentorship Manifesto](#) with tips to help families thrive in the digital age.

Yalda Uhls: [Media Moms and Digital Dads: A Fact-Not-Fear Based Approach to Parenting in the Digital Age](#)

Online Resources

[Commonsensemedia.org](#) is the leading independent nonprofit organization dedicated to helping kids thrive in a world of media and technology. We empower parents, teachers, and policymakers by providing unbiased information, trusted advice, and innovative tools to help them harness the power of media and technology as a positive force in all kids' lives.

[Media Glossary](#) (including texting acronyms) from the PBS website's parent resources.

[Online Resources Every Parent Should Know About](#), from [Real Simple](#), has links to online resources including Common Sense Media, but also Families Managing Media, The Family Online Safety Institute, and [yourbrainonporn.org](#) (a science-based website with information and resources about online porn addiction), and [Raising Digital Natives](#).

Articles

[Gray Matters: Too Much Screen Time Damages the Brain](#) by Victoria Dunckley M.D. in **Psychology Today**. Neuroimaging research shows excessive screen time damages the brain.

[How to Protect Your Kids from Cyber Bullying](#) Suggestions for whose rules to follow when at someone else's house from kids.gov.

[How Technology is Changing the Way Children Think and Focus](#) by Jim Taylor Ph.D. in **Psychology Today**. Are your children prepared to think and focus for success in 21st century life?

The New York Times has published some excellent articles on these issues:

[When Tech Is a Problem Child](#) by Bruce Feiler

[Screen Addiction is Taking a Toll on Children](#) by Jane Brody

[Hooked on Our Smart Phones](#) by Jane Brody

[Rules for Social Media Created by Kids](#) by Devorah Heitner

[Your Screen Time Rules or Mine](#) by Sue Shellenbarger, **The Wall Street Journal**

[Worried About Screen Time? Don't Let Kids Go It Alone](#) by Elissa Nadworny on NPR.org

Watch and Listen

PBS Newshour podcast: [The Drug-like Effect of Screen Time on the Teenage Brain](#). Gy Judy Woodruff with Dr. Delaney Ruston and William Brangham.

[The Challenges of Raising a Digital Native](#) A TedX talk by Devorah Heitner, an advocate for using empathy to help young people navigate the social and emotional aspects of our electronic lives as well as the nuts and bolts of learning how to live life online.

YouTube video of author and motivational speaker Simon Sinek appearing on an episode of *Inside Quest*: [On Millenials in the Workplace](#). Included in the extended video excerpt is a clear explanation of the connection between electronic use and dopamine in the brain.

[Screenagers](#) A highly personal account of teens and technology by a physical/film maker; the website also has useful links.