

## Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

# Navigating Technology in a Screen Obsessed World, Part 1



BY: KIM DEMARCHI

Screens are everywhere! Today's children grow up immersed in digital media. There isn't a day that goes by in which you avoid contact with an electronic screen of some kind. Children

are now faced with increasingly more options for screened entertainment, leaving families disconnected and disengaged.

Over the past decade, the use of digital media, including interactive and social media, has grown, and research evidence suggests that these newer media offer both benefits and risks to the health of children and teenagers. The AAP - The American Academy of Pediatrics (largest group of pediatricians) put out the latest guidelines in October 2016 to help families balance digital and real life from birth to adulthood.

### Evidence based Benefits:

- Early learning
- Exposure to new ideas and knowledge
- Increased opportunities for social contact and support
- New opportunities to access health promotion messages and information

### Risks:

- Problems begin when media use displaces physical activity, hands-on exploration and face-to-face social interaction in the real world, which is critical to learning
- Negative health effects on sleep, attention, and learning
- A higher incidence of obesity and depression
- Cyber bullying (can occur with 100 percent anonymity: yik yak)
- "Sexting"
- Exposure to inaccurate, inappropriate, or unsafe content and contacts
- Compromised privacy and confidentiality

### Recommendations:

- For children younger than 18 months, avoid use of screen media other than video-chatting.
- The AAP recommends parents prioritize creative, unplugged playtime for infants and toddlers. Some media can have educational value for children starting at around 18 months of age, but it's critically important that this be high-quality programming, such as the content offered by Sesame Workshop and PBS. Parents of young children should watch media with their child, to help children understand what they are seeing.

- For children ages 2 to 5 years, limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality programs. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.
- For children ages 6 and older, place consistent limits on the time spent using media, and the types of media, and make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviors essential to health. For school-aged children and adolescents, the idea is to balance media use with other healthy behaviors.
- Designate media-free times together, such as dinner or driving, as well as media-free locations at home, such as bedrooms.
- Have ongoing communication about online citizenship and safety, including treating others with respect online and offline.

Parents have so many questions surrounding technology. First, let me say digital devices (including smart phones) can be amazing and convenient tools, but for parents they often raise more questions than they answer, such as:

- "What kind of computer/phone/gaming system?"
- "What rules or guidelines should we have?"
- "Who's going to pay for it/bills/apps/games?"
- "How do we set appropriate limits for our children?"

No single answer will be right for everyone. What is most important is to discover what works best for your family, and to find the balance of embracing technology with some boundaries that align with your family values.

Probably the most frequently asked question around technology and digital devices is "At what age should our child get their own phone?" It's the most frequently asked question, but NOT necessarily the most important question.

The most important questions centered around getting your child a mobile phone are:

- What is the purpose of getting a phone?
- Are there circumstances such as having two households or both parents working and trying to figure out carpool?
- Is my child responsible with things? (Not going to lose it or leave it or drop it into the toilet)
- What are our family values and how does giving our child a phone impact them?
- Is this a NEED or a WANT? (There is a big difference!)



- What kind of phone will we get? Emergency with only 3 numbers, calling and texting only, or a smart phone?
- What kind of guidelines will we have around the device?

I was a contributing author for an eBook: *Help! My Child is Addicted to Screens (Yikes! SO AM I): Managing Family Screen Time* by Jane Nelsen and Kelly Bartlett. You can find it on Amazon for \$5.99. In it, I wrote a contract for a cell phone that can be used or modified. I used one for each of my kids and there are actually a lot of points to our agreement, and it has evolved and will continue to do so over time. It's incredibly valuable to create the agreement together so you get more buy in from your kids. Some include:

- We will pay for the phone and monthly charges. You will pay for any apps and music that you buy, and repairs if needed. And chargers that are lost!
- When we call you, please answer the phone. We aren't calling to chit chat and we don't want to be screened.
- Use the same respectful manners on your phone that you use in person: say hello, please, thank you.
- Be kind and understanding. If you wouldn't say it to someone in person, refrain from saying it via text.
- Be aware of the photos you post of yourself and others on social media. Digital is forever. And can go viral. And, please limit the number of "selfies" posted.
- We will know your location at all times. Safety always first.
- There will be times that we insist you put your phone away. Family time is important.

When a child turns 16, we don't just buy them a car, hand over the keys, and say, "Good luck, I hope you don't have any big accidents or injure yourself or anyone else. I hope you can figure it out." NO! We get them driver's lessons, they take driver's education in school, we take them out and teach them, we give them practice, they study the rules of the road, and ultimately, they take two tests. And if they pass both the written and driving test, then they are given access to being a driver, and even still there are restrictions on who they can drive, where they can drive and what hours they can drive. NEVER should we give our child a smart phone and say, "Good luck, you've never had one, you don't really know how to navigate it, you haven't been taught social media etiquette, but hey, go for it! Hope too many people don't get hurt along the way." You are the most influential person in your child's life. Take the time for this training too.

**Look for Part Two in next month's Tualatin Life, or to read the entire article now, visit [tualatinlife.com/featured/navigating-technology-in-a-screen-obsessed-world/](http://tualatinlife.com/featured/navigating-technology-in-a-screen-obsessed-world/).**

**Kim DeMarchi, M.Ed.**, Certified Parent Educator and Certified Family Coach, is a Tualatin resident, married with 17 year old boy/girl twins, and has been an educator for more than two decades. Kim is trained and certified through Positive Discipline, as well as the International Network for Children and Families in a program called Redirecting Children's Behavior. Kim is active in supporting her local parenting community by providing



workshops, coaching families and writing articles for our newspaper. Kim is a monthly guest on KATU's Afternoon Live and AM Northwest. She also blogs twice a month for Knowledge Universe's Kindercare online community. Kim's goal for you is to help reduce conflict, foster mutual respect, and create deeper communication and connections with your loved ones. She can be reached through [EmpoweredParenting.com](http://EmpoweredParenting.com).