

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Navigating Technology in a Screen Obsessed World, Part 2



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Part One ran in last month's Tualatin Life. To read the entire article, visit tualatinlife.com/featured/navigating-technology-in-a-screen-obsessed-world/.

Last month we started the conversation about all the benefits, as well as risks, to the constant media our kids are exposed to. Kids are wanting and getting screens at an earlier age, now more than ever before. There are some critical issues to think about ahead of time regarding use and abuse of screens.

1. LIMITS: Should parents place limits on media use for their children?

Absolutely! Smart phones and iPads aren't just another toy; they are a computer! Some limits should be negotiable such as what games the kids are allowed to download and if they are allowed to take them on long car rides. Some are non-negotiable such as not paying for any downloads and not allowing phones at the dinner table and docking them downstairs before bedtime.

2. PARENTAL CONTROLS: Should parents utilize parental controls on cell phones and various types of technology?

The simple answer is yes! But, I will also say that the best parental control is to be an active, engaged parent! As a parent, my best line of defense is myself. Talking with my kids and communicating about everything related to cell phones is most important. But because this is uncharted territory for both parents and children, in most cases, there are Parental Controls on phones that can be set up on the phones. Then, you can enable the restrictions you want, such as: restricting the use of Safari, or iTunes, or installing apps. You can also prevent access to specific content areas, such as: R rated movies, music with foul language, etc. You can also buy apps for child safety, apps that email parents if child visited any questionable sights. There are apps to help with these things such as: Bark, Net Nanny, Limitly, Our Pact, Qustodio, ScreenTime Labs, Teen Safe, Life 360, Phone Sheriff, My Mobile Watchdog, Screen Retriever, Mobile Spy, and so many others. Some of this depends on the age of your child, your comfort level as the parent, and your child's responsibility level.

3. PASSWORDS: Should parents know their child's password for cell phones and technology and isn't that an invasion of privacy?

I realize this is a slippery slope, but assuming you have a solid, trusting relationship with your child, yes. My children got their cell phones when they started middle school and they needed to give me their passwords on their phones every time they changed them.

Morals are developing and it's okay if a child knows their parents know their passwords.

A child thinking, "I wonder what my parents will think of this post?" isn't such a bad thing. Knowing the passwords let the child know that you will be checking periodically.

This isn't at all about invading your child's privacy; it's about teaching them how to navigate this new tool they've been given. I've heard it been called, The Trust But Verify System --- meaning, "I trust you at the age you are, and will make sure you are using the technology in an appropriate way for your age." It's not spying; it's participating and dialoging. Make sure, though, that your intention is to only teach respectfully, not snoop.

4. EXAMPLE: Be a model digital citizen and teach your children how to be media literate. Should parents monitor and control their own use?

Of course! We are our child's best teacher. It's not what we say, it's what we do. If I don't want my child to text while driving, then I must not text while driving. If I don't want my child to answer their phone or text during dinner, then I better not bring my phone to the dinner table. If I don't want them to have their ringer on in the movie theater, then I better have mine on silent. Kids emulate everything we do! If you are struggling with your own adult screen time management, check out Self Control app.

5. SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS: Ideas to help with usage and over usage?

- Avoid "Technoference"! Don't let media use interfere with family relationships, particularly at mealtimes, playtime and bedtime.
- Create "No Phone Zones." For example, our No Phone Zone is any dining table during any meals anywhere.
- Utilize "Tech Time Outs," which could mean "No tech Tuesdays" OR "Tech-free Fridays".



- Establish "Unplugged Times" for whole family. Examples may include family vacations, Sunday night family movie night, family game nights, and certain family excursions.
- Responsibilities such as homework and chores always first, then screen time privileges.
- Dock devices at the docking station at a certain time each evening, for example downstairs in the kitchen by 9 p.m.
- Be "friends" with your children on social media sites (ie: Instagram, Sinsta, Trinsta, Snap Chat, Twitter, etc. so you can see what gets posted and use them as learning opportunities.

Media should work for you and work within your family values and parenting style.

When media is used thoughtfully & appropriately, media can enhance daily life.

But when used inappropriately or without thought, media can displace many important activities such as face-to-face interaction, family-time, outdoor-play, exercise, unplugged downtime and sleep. By creating a Personalized Family Media Use Plan, you can be aware of when you are using media to achieve your purpose. This requires parents and users to think about what they want those purposes to be. The tool below will help you to think about media and create goals and rules that are in line with your family's values.

The AAP - The American Academy of Pediatrics (largest group of pediatricians) - published an interactive, online tool so families can create a personalized Family Media Use Plan: www.healthychildren.org/mediauseplan

What's most important is that parents be their child's "media mentor." That means teaching them how to use it as a tool to create, connect and learn. The key is mindful use of media within a family. These tech talks might be some of the toughest and most important talks you'll ever have with your kids, and certainly ones that are on-going.

On a side note, the best tool to review everything digital: Common Sense Media (website or phone app).

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