

Setting Boundaries for Tech Addicted Kids (and Parents)

You've tried your best but no matter what you do, your child's favorite activity is to spend all day on their smart phone or tablet. If bribery, discipline, and intervention has not worked, it's time for you to face the truth: **your child may have a tech addiction.**

Here are a few things you should think about before limiting your family's screen time:

Examine Your Own Tech Usage

I never used to be a big TV person, but my husband used to turn the TV on when he woke up each morning and kept it on until bedtime. I broke him of this habit because I find background noise terribly distracting. I'm guilty too, though. Games like Candy Crush relax me and I can easily overindulge. Additionally, I've exchanged books for Kindle downloads. While I know I'm reading a book, to my children it looks like screen time.

How much time do you use screens and tech devices around your children? They will learn from what they see, not just what you tell them to do.

Breaking your child's tech habit begins with working on your own.

Overuse of Smart Phones

With so many families exchanging landlines for smart phones, many of us now feel we need 24/7 access to our phones. We use them for so many of life's details too: car navigation, camera at events, scheduling our days.

Even though such phone use is practical and handy, many of us have lost the ability to leave home without it. Take stock of how often you use and rely on your phone and other devices and think about which are not necessary.

The Myth of Boredom

We live in a day and age where boredom is intolerable and we've taught that to our children too. Most people don't know what to do if they have five minutes of free time.

However, research has shown that boredom is linked to creativity. If you or your children are struggling to be creative, to solve problems and to think outside the box, you may be spending too much of your downtime on your devices.

The Lies We Tell Ourselves

I have a secret. I'm actually thrilled when my learning-disabled daughter is playing an age-appropriate video game. She struggled for years with these games, but almost overnight, seemed to have mastered one her dad likes.

Pretty cool, right? The downside is that, like most kids, she would rather play lots of games than read a single chapter in a book. I'm still happy with her accomplishment but it must be balanced with other offline activities.

HOUSE RULES FOR SETTING BOUNDARIES

1. Create places and times that are tech free in your home.

We have one big rule: NO phones or tablets while you're eating. We also keep all our devices on the first floor – except for my Kindle – to make sure the kids don't go to sleep with their phones.

2. Turn Wi-Fi Off.

This is an easy way to create “tech-free” times in your home.

3. Optimize their screen time.

Your family members are going to be on their devices, so do your best to encourage educational activities that engage the whole family or boosts a skill. For example, my daughter loves photos so I'm teaching her to take pictures with her tablet and using apps to hone that skill.

4. Create tech-free family activities to do regularly.

While it's fun to play a video game or watch a movie together, it's better yet if you can come up with activities that involve zero screen time. For example, a daily walk after dinner is something we do together whenever the weather is nice. Sunshine and fresh air can positively counteract too much screen time. Playgrounds, swimming, hiking, bowling, laser tag, trampolines, library/book store events, seasonal activities, sports events, etc. are all good ideas.

5. Leave the phone behind.

For any trip that's under an hour, just leave the phone at home if you can, or leave it in your car. Don't give it to the kids while you're waiting for food to arrive at a restaurant, are waiting in line at the grocery checkout, or other “wait” times for activities. You'll create a bad habit that is very difficult to break down the road.

6. Create boundaries for using devices.

Create a list of what your children must do before they turn on the TV, gaming device, tablet or phone. This can include crafts, chores, play time and time outside. Perhaps you can integrate a time for helping others, like volunteering at a soup kitchen or organizing a clothing donation field trip.

Technology is a great tool for children, but like everything else, moderation is key. **Don't let them spend their whole lives in front of the screen when a whole world of activity awaits them.**