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Voices from the Village: How can we manage screen time?

By Alexandra Muller Arboleda | May 2014

Technology is exciting, enticing and ever evolving. Its seductiveness has made “screen time”—time spent using an electronic device such as a television, computer, smart phone, tablet or game console—this generation’s most common parent/child power struggle.

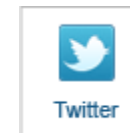
How can we distinguish between “good” and “bad” time spent in the technology playground? How can we create reasonable expectations for its use? And how can we get our kids on board?

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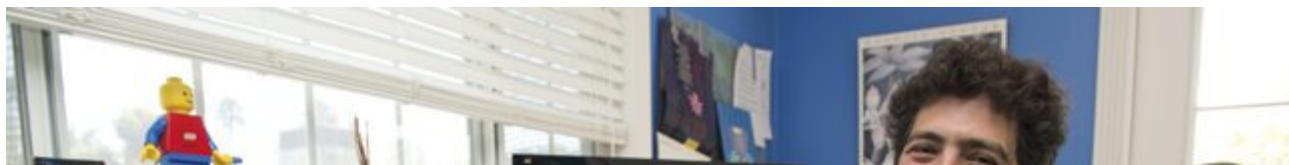


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FAMILY TIME!

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Michael Handelman, of Phoenix, is the owner of Playtime Interactive, which designs and builds educational games for kids. He has designed and produced hundreds of children's interactive products and has worked with companies such as LeapFrog, PBS Kids, Pearson Education and Mattel. Handelman has two children: Maya and Lila.

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Look for the gems amid the clutter

By Michael Handelman

As a developer of kids' interactive media, I have played thousands of video games and apps over the past 14 years and can say that most are not worth a minute of any child's time and energy. I think the same can be said about most TV shows and movies—and even many books.

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pick up an Xbox controller? Because once you sift through the heaps of bad content—there are more than a million apps in the Apple store alone—you will find some real gems.

It's important to view these devices as tools that can either suck away precious minutes or enable wonderful experiences, whether for educational and social reasons or just plain fun.

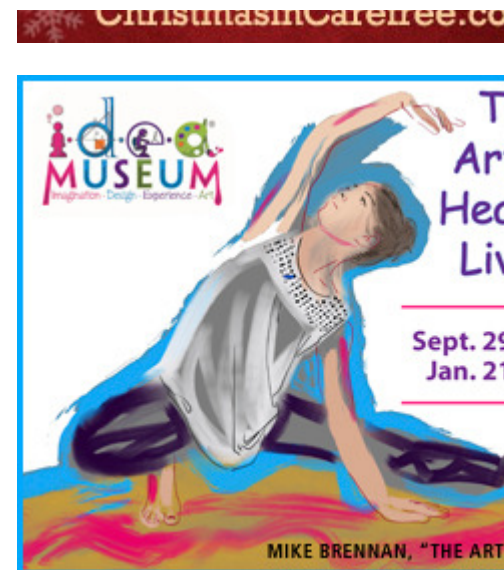
When my 10-year-old daughter needed help with her fractions homework, I downloaded an app that quickly helped her learn concepts her worksheets couldn't adequately convey. When my 7-year-old had questions about the human body, we played a game that led to valuable discussions. I love seeing the Video Star music videos my kids make together and with friends.

My advice is to educate yourself. Consult good review sites, including free sites like Common Sense Media, Tech With Kids, appo Learning or subscription-based Children's Technology Review.

Play the games with your kids. Teach them to be mindful of their minutes. After all, screen time is not necessarily good or bad—it's what you do with it that counts.



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D. Scott Herrmann, PhD, ABPP, is a licensed psychologist, board-certified specialist in clinical child and adolescent psychology and co-founding member of Arizona Child Psychology, PLLC. He is the father of Carlie.



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Enforce boundaries

By D. Scott Herrmann

Managing screen time is the most significant parenting challenge of the 21st century. There are many wonderful technological resources available to youth today, but children and teens are not mature enough to regulate the use of them.

Enforcing boundaries is important to keep kids safe. Screen time should be limited by developmental age and content should be closely monitored. But nailing down specific time limits is fraught with challenges because so many factors are involved.

As the bill payers, parents hold the “keys to the kingdom.” Don’t be afraid to set appropriate limits with technology and screen time, even if you get pushback. Harness the power of these devices by limiting their use and by making their access contingent upon good behavior.

Here are some boundaries our practice recommends:

• Allow non-educational screen time only when obligations such as homework and chores

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- In divorce situations, avoid parenting by handhelds; the parent who is physically present is the one on duty.
- Teen drivers should store handhelds in the trunk while driving.
- Because hackers can hijack webcams, never allow handhelds in bathrooms or bedrooms.
- Do not permit access to handhelds and screens during sleep hours.
- Establish technology-free days or zones (the dinner table, for example) to facilitate family communication.



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College. Her Scottsdale practice specializes in performance and sport psychology, emotional intelligence, parenting and interpersonal dynamics and communication. She has three children: Isabel, Hannah and Jonah.

Keep it mindful

By Jennifer Serlin, PhD

When screen time is intentional, it is a tool that can enhance our lives. Intentional, or mindful, screen time is a useful way for parents to model and teach focus and emotional regulation—critical skills that facilitate well-being and success throughout children’s lives.

Technology use by default—TV on in the background, phone always in hand—disrupts meaningful interactions and activities. It’s OK to use technology to “veg out” for a brief period of time, but research indicates that after 30 minutes we are no longer relaxing but entering a state of inertia that actually saps our energy.

As parents we need to be aware of the messages we are sending with our own screen time. We need to model appropriate behaviors.

Mixed messages are the strongest ones. If I tell my kids to turn off the computer while I’m sending a text message (even if it’s about carpooling), that mixed message diminishes my credibility and authority.

When children are younger, transitioning in and out of screen time can be difficult. Limit screen time and help children learn to regulate these transitions. Giving your child a two-minute window to begin shutting down and having another activity lined up can help reduce the jarring effect of unplugging. During the tween years—when screen time expands to include cell phones—boundaries and parental modeling are particularly important. Teenagers still need help with limits on screen use but must begin learning to implement

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Intentional technology use reminds us that we are only controlled by screen time if we let ourselves be.



William V. Fabricius, PhD, of Tempe and New York City, a developmental psychologist and associate professor of psychology at Arizona State University, has studied the social-cognitive development of children from early childhood to adolescence. Fabricius has two grown children: Anna and John.

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By William V. Fabricius, PhD

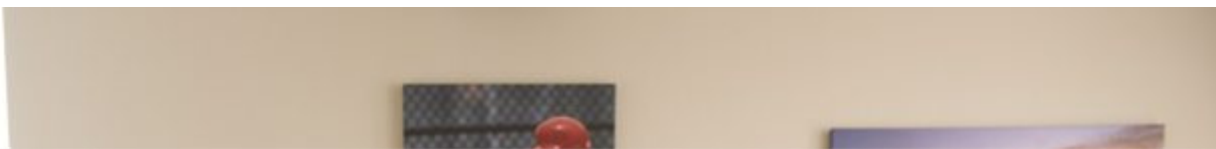
There are two things to remember when it comes to questions about kids and screen time. One is that the child's brain is programmed through adolescence in ways that will be hard to change later. The other is that the only way children learn the most important things they need to know about the physical and social world is by interacting with real things and with people face-to-face.

So it's a trade-off. The more screen time, the less their brains are learning about the real world. And the younger the child, the more consequential this trade-off becomes.

The amount of information young brains must process is staggering: motor control of their own bodies; things and spaces in their environment and how to use them; people and how to interact with them; and last but not least, language. They learn none of that from interacting with images on screens.

As children get older, what they learn about people—themselves included—becomes increasingly complex. So do the language skills needed to communicate. People and language skills develop from face-to-face time. Children learn the most basic things about themselves—self-esteem and the ability to express themselves without fear of rejection—from family interactions.

Contrary to popular belief, adolescents want to spend time with their parents! Experience with the real physical and social world makes a difference in how children's brains are programmed, and parents have 18 years to see to that.



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Harry Lee Broome Jr., MD, FAAP, is a pediatrician at MVP Kids in Phoenix and Avondale. He has three children: Payson, Evan and Anna.

Keep kids moving

By Harry Lee Broome Jr., MD, FAAP

I frequently enter an exam room and see a 2-year-old playing on his mother's iPhone. Occasionally that child will look up and ask for his mother's password. When I ask older children, "What are your interests or hobbies?" the most common answer is "video games."

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends fewer than two hours of daily recreational screen time for children—and no unsupervised screen time for children under 3. I can assure you that advice is not commonly followed.

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Food consumption while watching television is associated with increased BMI (body mass index) and contributes to obesity. Increased screen time, especially on mobile handheld devices, has other deleterious effects, including texting-associated car crashes. In my practice, doctors have treated numerous cases of texting-related wrist pain, laptop skin burns and Wii injuries.

Social effects include children and teens spending dinnertime in local restaurants staring at phones instead of conversing. Bullying has begotten cyber-bullying.

Parental monitoring is vital to our children's health and safety. Serve as examples. Set and stick to rules and limits and explain why the limits are in place.

Track screen hours for a week or two then set achievable goals to reduce the total. Some examples: no games after dinner, no TV or phone use during dinner, no phones or texting in the car and no TV, games or computers in bed.

Don't allow unsupervised screen time for children under age 3. And certainly don't give them your passwords!

Tags: Parenting, screen time, technology, voices from the village

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Alexandra Muller Arboleda

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mother of Isabel (14) and Nicolas (11). She has worked as a water lawyer and a law and logic teacher. She is also certified to teach yoga.

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