



Essentials of a Screen-Balanced Home

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P A R E N T I N G



TOOLS FOR RAISING KIDS WHO LOVE GOD AND LOVE OTHERS

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You may remember the Partnership for a Drug-Free America commercial that famously says, “This is drugs,” as it shows a picture of an empty frying pan. Then, as an egg is dropped onto the frying pan and begins to sizzle, the script continues, “This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?”

Consider this checklist as a way for you to prevent today’s egg (your child’s brain) from dropping in the frying pan (an overuse of screens).

“Anything you cannot fast from owns you.”

IS TECHNOLOGY ALL BAD?

In 1908, the Model T Ford was the first automobile to be mass-produced. As cars became more popular and affordable, increasing numbers of people had them. But increasing numbers of people were also being injured or killed by them as well. As a result, in 1949, standard disc brakes were introduced. Ten years later, in 1959, three point seatbelts were added too. Then came the padded dashboard, brake lights, rear lights, child safety seats, and now airbags.

Are cars bad for us? No. They get us from point A to point B. They enable us to connect with family and friends at further distances in faster times.

But without safety measures, they’re damaging—and potentially fatal.

The same could be said for technology in the emotional, relational, and spiritual lives of our families. The sad news is that no legislative body is looking out for your marriage or children. The ease of access to pornography online is evidence enough. The only person looking out for your family is YOU.

Our hope is that it doesn’t take 41 years for you to implement standard disc brakes on technology in your home.

We don’t believe technology is bad. But we do believe without brakes, it is.

PARENTS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

If you have young children, consider these statistics:

In 1970 the average age of first screen exposure was 4 years old. Today it is 4 months old.

The more television kids watched prior to age 3, the more likely they were to have attention problems later in life. Specifically, a child under age 2, viewing 2 hours of TV a day, is 20% more likely to develop attention deficit problems later in life, compared to a child who watched none. The findings were 10% higher per hour.

The more cognitive stimulation the child had prior to age 3, (i.e. the more often parents read to the child, took them to the museum, sang to them) the less likely they had attention problems later in life. In fact, each hour of cognitive stimulation reduced attention problems by about 30%.^[i]



PARENTS WITH CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

The following is a brief overview of the general effects of technology on the brain. Overuse of technology is found to make it more difficult for a child's budding brain to:

- Problem-solve
- Meditate
- Connect ideas together
- Pay attention (which is leading to even stronger effects on our kids in other areas of life such as academics and focus)

Research also shows the following:

- Human face-to-face connection is linked to higher levels of happiness
- There is a direct positive correlation between the amount of time spent on social media and feelings of depression
- Multitasking between devices makes us less productive
- Sequential tasking, doing one task at a time, is more productive for all individuals than trying to answer email, write a paper, and listen to music at the same time
- Technology creates a lack of downtime. This lack of downtime is inhibiting our children's creativity
- Lack of sleep has damaging effects on the brain. Sleeping with technology beside our bed is dramatically reducing our teenager's amount of sleep
- Gaming and online activities trigger the pleasure center of the brain, meaning we need more and more to get the same effect. When we don't get it, life becomes boring without it ^[iii]

PARENTING & TECHNOLOGY

- In a first of its kind study, researchers studied how devices affect caregiver-child interactions in a restaurant setting and found that the “dominant theme to mobile device use and caregiver-child interaction was the degree of absorption” the caregivers exhibited in their smartphone. The researchers defined absorption as “the extent to which primary engagement was with the device, rather than the child.”
- One of the important findings is how parent absorption in devices affects how they engage with and manage their child’s behavior. In the study, highly absorbed caregivers often responded harshly to misbehavior. [iv]



[i] Christakis, D. Media and Children. Tedx Rainer. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoT7qH_uVNo

[ii] Twenge, J. & Campbell, W. K. (2010). The narcissism epidemic. New York: Free Press.

[iii] Much of the summarized data in this document comes from Hart, A. D. & Frejd, S. H. (2013). The digital invasion: How technology is shaping you and your relationships. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books and Carr, N. (2011). The shallows: What the internet is doing to our brains. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

[iv] Radesky, J.S., Kistin, C.J., Zuckerman, B., Nitzberg, K., Gross, J., Kaplan-Sanoff, M., Augustyn, M., & Silverstein, M. (2014, April). Patterns of mobile device use by caregivers and children during meals in fast food restaurants. *Pediatrics* 133(4). Retrieved from: <http://pediatrics.aapublications.org/content/early/2014/03/05/peds.2013-3703.full.pdf+html>

THE ESSENTIALS OF A SCREEN-BALANCED HOME

If you remember anything as it relates to technology and screens, remember this one phrase: “Anything you cannot fast from owns you.”

As you think about your relationship with your spouse, kids, and especially with Jesus, ask yourself if you are able to fast from your phone? Or does your screen negatively influence your relationships?

Here are some essential “brakes” to apply in your home as it relates to screens. Some of these will apply differently depending on the age of your children. You can certainly add to or modify any of these suggested “brakes.” But remember, brakes are essential.

- No technology at the family breakfast/dinner table
- Set up a “Family Tech Zone” in your home: where all technology is used/docked/charged at this station. This creates accountability.
- Get an alarm clock instead of using your phone beside your bed.
- Use a landline phone for emergencies.
- Keep bedrooms “tech-free”.
- Set a 24-hour Tech-Free or social media Fast Day in your home each week.
- Cell phones are only used as cell phones after a certain time (like 6 PM).
- Set a Family Screen Schedule with your family
- Set a Marital E-Nup (electronic nuptial agreement) with your spouse
- Set texting hours on kids’ cellphones
- At night, plug in your kids’ cell phones at the Family Tech Zone, or in your room
- Monitor text messages / apps
- Set geo-fences
- Put computer in family room
- Schedule screen time to 2 hours / day
- Schedule face-to-face family time and activities
- Plan a one-time Tech Free day from all technology each month
- No phone until after morning devotions
- Only emails/ social media at certain times and for certain periods throughout day
- No TV or Internet-connected devices in child’s bedroom.
- Watch TV, movies, and videos with children and teenagers, and use this as a way of discussing important family values.
- Establish reasonable but firm and negotiated rules about cell phones, texting, Internet, and social media use with teenagers.