Q: Why is it important to limit screen time?

A: The internet, educational video games, and television can be a great source of fun for children and adults. Like anything, it is about finding balance. Being present in the moment, engaging with family and friends around us, and enjoying our surroundings are important aspects of life that can be compromised when there are no healthy limits on screen time.

Adults need to self-regulate their use of digital devices. When we are on our screens too much, we are more likely to be sedentary, which impacts our physical health. We also may stay up late on our devices, or be woken up by them during the night, which impacts our quality of sleep.

Facebook addiction. Constant texting. Sneaking Candy Crush. Oversharing. No, it’s not your kids – it’s YOU. When it comes to managing your kids’ screen time, there’s no shortage of ideas for setting limits (see tips on the next page). But what about your needs?

Studies on parents’ screen habits point to device-distracted moms and dads as a growing problem for kids. It’s enough to make you want to maybe – just maybe – turn off your phone and shut down your devices. But how to actually do that? These tips can help.

1. Keep a running list of “Things to google later.” There’s a scene in the Ben Stiller movie “While We’re Young” where the childless hipsters decide against googling a word in favor of just not knowing. In fact, staying in the conversation and not checking your phone for an answer or information can lead to even more conversation. Decide what’s critical to know immediately (allergic reactions, for example) and what’s just good to know (where Legos were invented). Tell your kids to keep you accountable.

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“Keeping in Touch” is a monthly publication for employees covered by The Village Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through their employer’s benefit package. If you have questions about your EAP benefit, or if you would like to access services, call 1-800-627-8220.

COUNSELOR COLUMN

Rachel Blumhardt, M.Ed, LPCC, NCC
The Village Family Service Center
Clinical Supervisor

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5 WAYS TO SAVE YOURSELF FROM DEVICE ADDICTION

By Caroline Knorr | Common Sense Media

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2. Tame your device. If you can’t turn it off completely, just keep it quiet. In the iPhone’s Settings section, you can turn off notifications, enable Do Not Disturb, and silence alerts in Sounds. In Phone Settings, you can set up automatic text replies. If you only need to be on alert for an email from the boss, in iOS you can create a VIP setting that notifies you of important emails. Android apps such as My VIP Calls only let through calls from specific people (such as your kid’s teacher, who may call when you’re in a meeting).

3. That goes for vibrate mode, too. That feeling you get when you think you felt your phone vibrate? And you pick it up and there’s no message but you decide to check Facebook since you’re already looking at your phone? It’s called “phantom vibration mode,” and one theory is it afflicts people who rely on their phones to regulate their emotional states.

4. Get yourself some parental controls. If you google “smartphone addiction,” you’ll find lots of apps designed to monitor adults’ phone use.

5. Practice mindfulness. Studies show that smartphones and devices distract us even when we’re not using them. That’s a problem that calls for some serious soul-searching. To calm that “always-on” feeling, consider a meditation app such as Headspace, which applies Zen principles to daily life. Information reprinted with permission from www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/5-ways-to-save-yourself-from-device-addiction

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It is important to make a choice to set your phone down, such as when your child is at the playground, and to have a “no phones at the table” rule when eating with others. This shows your loved ones that your relationship with them in the here and now is more important than the newest game or social media post on your phone. There can be a loss of connection in relationships when we are distracted and focus on screens rather than those around us. We miss nonverbal cues. We are less likely to notice if our partner had a bad day at work and needs to talk. We are not as aware of our children and their needs.

Children practice what they see, and adults are their role models. Discussing self-regulation of technology and having conversations about appropriate use of screen time will help kids make healthy choices. This is also a crucial time for them to learn social interaction skills and motor skills that are hard to achieve when children are engaging on their iPads or Kindles.

When kids are using their screens, participate with them and engage with what they are doing. Keeping an active, engaged relationship will strengthen your bond and help you be aware of when and how long they are on devices.

We live in a technology-filled environment. Devices are used on a daily basis at work, in schools, and in the community to read, communicate, and access information, so simply not using screens is an unlikely option. Setting clear limits for when we use them and being intentional is key. Adults and children can balance their screen time with being socially engaged with those around them, physically active in their environment, and intentionally making the most of their days.

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STRATEGIES FOR GETTING KIDS OFF DEVICES

Have another activity lined up (bonus points for making it seem fun). For the youngest device users, transitions are hard—period. Even if the next “to do” is a “must do” (such as eating lunch), tell your kid what’s coming next. You can rehearse the process: “When I say stop, it’s time for the iPad to go night-night. Let’s see how fast you can flip it shut! As soon as it’s asleep, we can sneak into the other room and paint.”

Use visual and sound cues to help kids keep track of time limits. For kids who don’t yet know how to tell time, try a timer that can help put them in charge of the process: “When the time is up, it’ll look and sound like this.”

Find apps with built-in timers. Video streamers like Cakey and Huvi throw parents a bone and have internal timers so the app stops on its own. Then it’s up to the parent to make sure kiddo doesn’t just jump into another app.

Tell kids to stop at a natural break, such as the end of an episode, level, or activity. It’s hard for kids (and adults!) to stop in the middle of something. Before your kid gets on a device, talk about what they want to do or play, what will be a good place to stop, and how long they think it’ll take. Set the limit together and hold to it, though a little wiggle room (a couple of minutes so they can finish) is fine.

Discuss consequences and follow through when kids test the limits. When all else fails, it’s important to have discussed consequences for when your kid won’t give it up. For little kids, the line can be something like, “If it’s too hard to turn off, the tablet has to go away for a whole day.” For older kids it’s more about keeping devices in a public space, setting expectations, and enforcing them. If they show you they can be partners in moderating and regulating themselves, there can be more flexibility.

www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/5-strategies-for-getting-kids-off-devices

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