

PARENT GUIDE

Having weekly, short, calm conversations with your family about tech is so important. Tech Talk Tuesday (TTT), our weekly blog, offers you tools and tips for discussions. Families tell us it's making a huge difference. Visit our website www.screenagersmovie.com/tech-talk-tuesdays/ to try one. It's never too late to start a conversation about technology but often doing it in baby steps is more effective. —Delaney Ruston, MD, filmmaker of Screenagers

4 Basic rules to consider— (go to www.screenagersmovie.com to find ways to enforce rules)

1. No screens in bedrooms when kids and teens go to sleep (for younger kids keep screens out completely). Fact: 75% teens get inadequate sleep. The presence of devices disrupts sleep cycles.
2. Set time goals for studying without multitasking and then, also, take tech breaks. Fact: Multitasking is linked to less retention and poorer academic outcomes.
3. Eat family meals without devices. Fact: Face-to-face conversations improve mood and empathy.
4. Put phones and devices away in the car. Fact: More than half of kids report seeing their parents text while driving.

3 Tips to help your child build self-control

1. Science shows that positive rewards work better than punishment. For example, if you observe your child focused while doing their homework without their device, praise them.
2. Build times when tech is out of sight. Self-control is hard, so decrease temptations.
3. Use [ITT](#) to let your kids share with you about the reasons they like tech in their lives—the more they feel understood, the more they'll work with you on tech limits.

Discussion questions

- How much time do you think kids in the US spend looking at screens? (Kids spend an average of 6.5 hours a day on screens, not including classroom or homework.)
- How much time do you think you spend each week on screen-related activities?
- The film featured a study in which baby mice exposed to screen time developed fewer cells in the areas of learning and memory than non-exposed mice. Do you think this is true for humans too?
- Do you think violent video games desensitize people to violence?
- What are some popular games that don't involve violence?
- Have you experienced people using screens to avoid face-to-face interactions? Do you ever make comments online that you wouldn't make in person?

Resources at www.screenagersmovie.com

- Screen Time Contracts—Tips and screen time contracts templates, including Tessa's contract
- Parenting Apps—Tools that automatically turn off tech at certain times
- Digital Citizenship—Links to help teach this at home and in schools
- Parenting Tips—Ongoing practical advice from our blog, TTT and more

Be a *Mindful* Media Family

4 Steps to Creating Your Personalized Media/Digital Family Plan

An Invitation from Gloria DeGaetano...

Thank you for your dedication to raise your children optimally in this challenging, complex media/digital world. Screen technologies serve many important purposes and are a blessing in so many ways. Yet, a predominant screen world also has potential pitfalls that make it more difficult for parents, and not always easy for children to grow in healthy ways.

With a Plan in place, you have a roadmap to helping your children use screen technologies appropriately at each stage of development, while supporting their optimal growth in the process. You also have something to fall back on regularly when the nagging and whining starts—because we know it will. Having worked with hundreds of parents over the last three decades on screen-related dilemmas, I know that it often requires conviction and courage for parents to stay the course. I also know that a Plan, personalized to the unique needs of your family, helps a lot.

I invite you to take these four steps to develop your unique Family Media/Digital Device Plan. If you have any questions or just want to chat, please don't hesitate to contact me. I want to help you in any way that I can.

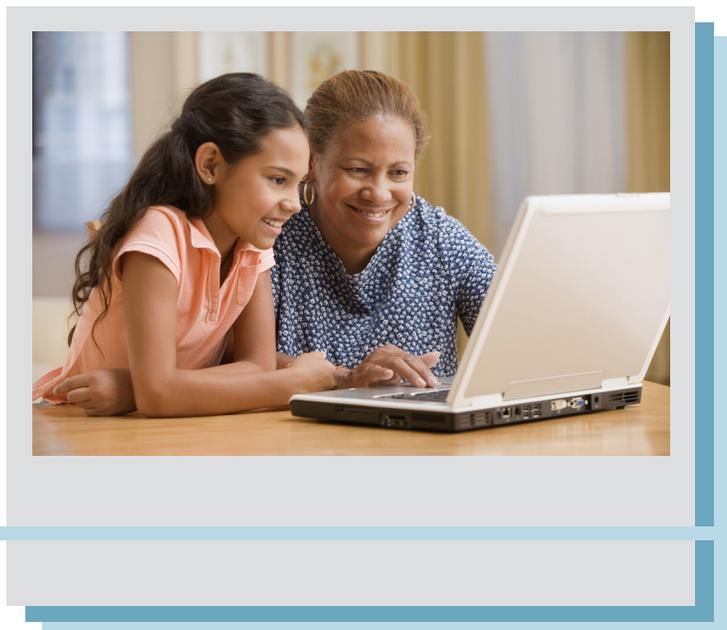
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Step #1: Decide What You Want—What You REALLY Want (CLARITY)

Now don't hesitate here. Dream BIG! What would you like your household to look like, feel like, with screen technologies? If you dream of your teen voluntarily coming to dinner with no cell phone, then write that down, even if you think it is not possible right now. If you want your toddler to not be reaching out for your cell phone all the time, put that down. And what would you like your little one to be doing instead? Add that, too. In other words, consider all that you want, trying hard not to think about how to get there—just yet.

Write: “My Ideal Day with My Kids and Screen Technologies”

After a few days, come back to it and see if you want to change anything.

Use these questions to help you:

- When your family feels most engaged with each other, what are you doing? How do computers, I-pads, cell phones, TV, etc. help your family come together and know each other better?
- What lights up your child's eyes outside of screen technologies? How does that make you feel?
- What builds your energy to parent well? What drains your energy? In your ideal day with screen technologies used only as you want them to be used by your children, consider what energizes you throughout your day. What makes you and your family feel alive and connected to each other?
- What is your Parenting Identity? What character traits and values define you as a parent? Consider writing down what you value most for yourself and for your children. Then determine 3-5 parenting priorities you hold most dear. How does use of screen technologies “fit” with your values and priorities?

Step #2: Consider the Reason/s for Any Screen Use (PURPOSE)

Adults use computers, I-pads, cell phones, etc. for four basic reasons:

- For information—to learn something new
- To communicate with family, friends, or work colleagues
- For entertainment as a diversion from the usual routine
- To create something important to us like a poem for Grandma's birthday or a spreadsheet for a new budget

Use these four reasons to consider how your children use screen technologies. You can ask yourself such questions as:

- Is the time spent with a screen serving a purpose in my child's development? If so, what is that purpose?
- What is my child learning by being with a computer or I-pad, cell phone, etc.?
- Does my child know why s/he is using the computer or I-pad, cell phone, etc.?
- Have I communicated the purpose for the screen use to my child? If not, what will I say?

Step #3: Hold a Family Meeting (FOCUS)

Now before this step, you may want to discuss in detail with your spouse what you hope to accomplish at this meeting. If you are not in a regular routine of conducting family meetings, please see The Family Meeting information below. Family Meetings can be rich times for productive conversations and enjoyment of being together to discuss how the week went for each family member. It is also a wonderful opportunity to consider: “How are we doing living together, cooperating with each other, and learning and growing together?”

At this meeting you will discuss with your children the concerns you have and the changes you are now going to put in place around the use of screen technologies. Remember to:

1. Give clear reasons for setting any new boundaries. (And yes, letting a child or teen know that their brains haven't finished growing yet is a good enough reason for a parent to set a screen time limit or forbid a violent video game in the house.)
2. Give the children a few choices you can live with and invite them to decide how they want to handle it:
 - a. With young children: “Look at the new things for you to play with when you are in the car with me. Do you want to take the rabbit with you when you listen to the Velveteen Rabbit on our errands today?” (You may want to wait until the actual moment you are going on errands and not give the child the options until then. Young children can engage in a family meeting through rehearsal. Rehearsing with a child what you will do and what he or she will do when you go on errands can be a form of playing pretend to prepare for the actual errand!)
 - b. With older kids and teens: “You can drop your cell phone in this new basket I am putting at the door when you come home from school immediately or you can keep them for an hour and then put them away for the night. Which will work best for you?”

After plenty of discussion and clarification, conclude the meeting with one agreed upon small change. It is important that it is one and that it is small. This is a beginning of your Media/Digital Device Plan. Starting small is very important.

Step #4: Do One Small Thing Consistently (ACTION)

OK, now that you have the one small thing that you all agreed upon, you will now do your best to consistently enforce it and encourage it. With different ages of children, each child may have a different small thing that they will be changing.

Since most parents want their children to spend less time with screen technologies, many families find that the small thing of 15 minutes less of screen time every day works for all age levels. When you begin your Mindful Media/Digital Device Plan, you may want to try out this one first since it can apply to everyone. Over time, you will see powerful results.

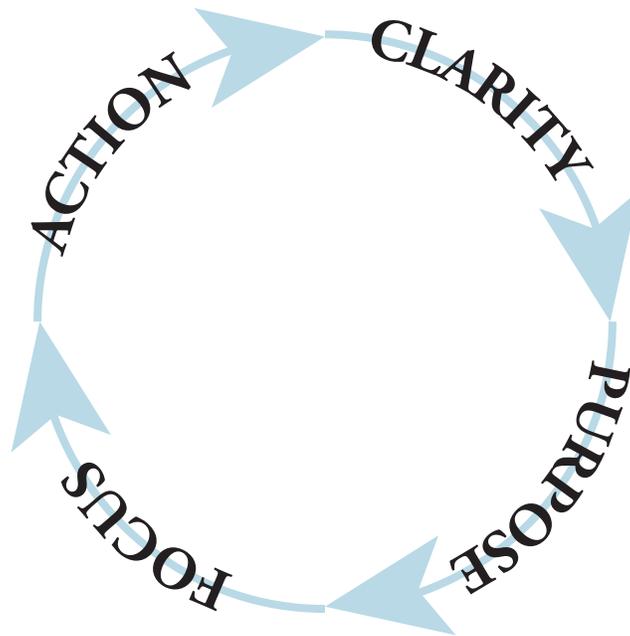
15 minutes every day, adds up to 105 minutes a week; 420 minutes a month; and 5,040 minutes a year—which is actually 84 hours! Giving your child the gift of 84 more hours every year to try out new experiences away from screen technologies enhances his/her cognitive, emotional, and social development.

As you implement the new, one small change remember to:

- Affirm your child for the wise decision s/he is making.
- Let your child know how the small change is supporting a mindful use of media/screen technologies.
- Reflect on what your family is gaining in energy and connection with the small change and let everyone know what you are observing.
- Consider what you are learning about your child's interests, strengths, and abilities to use screen technologies mindfully.
- With your newly found energy, decide on what is the next small change you would like to make to get closer to your ideal.

Congratulations! Now Make Your Plan On-Going...

If you repeat Steps 2, 3, and 4 each week (or each month), you are on your way to making many positive, important changes that fit with your values and priorities while engaging your children in using screen technologies mindfully and age-appropriately.



The Family Meeting: An Opportunity for Kids to Learn to Contribute

Parents who want to reduce discipline problems and enhance children's cooperation, along with their sense of purpose and contribution, will hold regular family meetings.

It is recommended that these meetings:

- Be held weekly at a time when the family can come together without any distractions.
- All children attend no matter how young. The little ones can sit and listen.

The parents divide the meeting into four parts:

Appreciation

Begin by stating what you appreciate your child/ren did right that week. Show appreciation for each other; for the good that happened in your family's life. Celebrate successes such as a good grade on a test or a new opportunity like learning a new musical instrument.

Organization and Planning

If the children have chores, frame the chores around how important they are to easeful family life. Discuss what needs to be organized or planned for the upcoming week. Children and teens, both thrive with predictability. This would be a time to talk about an upcoming business trip where you will be gone and what you might do with the kids/family when you return. It is also a good time for the kids to note any upcoming school assignments; tests—anything that will require them to prepare for. Many families find a white board in the family room or a central location with days of the week and a schedule very helpful. Kids can write their activities on the schedule as well.

Improvement and Growth

At Parent Coaching Institute, we have a “growth” mindset, since we are in the coaching business. We want parents to acquire that mindset as well when it comes to discipline or teaching their kids. This part of the meeting is the place to re-visit a time when your child disobeyed or didn't do what was expected. Discuss your expectations clearly. A good practice is to have your child role play what would be acceptable behavior for the situation. Often the misbehaving takes place when we are out in public, or very busy doing something and all we can say is “Stop That” because we are so distracted with all the demands on us as busy parents in modern-day life. Taking time to discuss these difficult moments of the past week during a family meeting slows the process down enough for the child to learn what you really expect. It also provides space for open communication so the child/teen can tell his/her “side of the story” and you can listen carefully and provide a thoughtful, fair, but firm consequence for the infraction or misbehavior.

Conclusion

End the meeting in a caring way to demonstrate love and family cohesion. And, sometimes end with some fun, such as enjoying a meal together, reading aloud a beautiful, inspiring poem, or just talking and hanging out for a while.

(Adapted from Gloria's upcoming book: *Parenting Well in Our Digital World*, 2016.)

8 Simple Steps to Strengthen Family Connections Every Day

Dr. Catherine Steiner-Adair

How do we begin to reboot our tech habits so we don't have so many mini-moments of disconnect on the home front? Based on couples and family relationship studies, what we know about child development, and what kids tell me matters most to them, these simple steps can make a big difference. Parents find these do-able and sustainable. The positive effects become a persuasive payoff for all.

1. Which way do you roll? You know, first thing in the morning: to the center of the bed to snuggle or to the outer edge to reach for your phone and check for messages? This choice is critical because it defines how you start your day, how you create your priorities. As a marriage and family therapist, I highly recommend rolling inward!

2. Up and at 'em—a little earlier! Get up 30 minutes earlier to check your email and tend to your start-of-day online tasks before you wake up your children. Plan ahead so that from the time they awake until they are out the door, it's screen-free time for everyone. In these transition moments throughout the day, kids need to feel you're calm and fully present to them, not distracted. They pick up on the sharp-edged "don't bother me now" tone in our voice if they interrupt us writing an email, compared to the friendlier response more likely if we're making breakfast or packing their lunches. If your children need to check online for notes from teachers or coaches, make that a simple on-and-off part of the routine.

3. Drive-time is no time for phones or screens. That goes for everyone. We have so little time together, let this be time to chat or sit in the surround sound of family quiet and daydream, which can be creative, calming and synthesizing time for children. Kids hate listening to grown-ups on their phone, hostages to half a conversation. "It feels bad and sad to be ignored in the car," one young child told me. And it can be stressful. "When I hear my parents fighting, I worry that something bad is going to happen and then I can't concentrate at school," a teen confided.

4. Perk up for pick-up. Stash your smartphone when you pick kids up. Nothing says "you don't matter that much," or "everyone and everything else is more important than you," than having a parent or caregiver pull up for pickup but hardly look up from a call or texting. Children like and need to be greeted by someone who is happy to see them. Make eye contact with your child, greet and genuinely connect with them. You can't be fully present to them if you're texting or talking to someone else. It can wait. This goes for the kids in the car, too! Once you allow your kids to text or play on screens in the car, you dilute the likelihood that you'll have the kinds of conversations that offer the social-emotional weather report from their day. They'll be texting that to their peers instead.

5. Down time is prime time. When your children come home from school, have snack and talk, hang out, play outside, play inside but don't punctuate coming home with screen time that isn't for homework. Children need to play in the three dimensional world, to interact with people and manipulatives—try Legos, puzzles, arts or crafts, or cooking. They need to pace themselves, relax and not get sucked into mesmerizing, stimulating screen games or TV. Make social media and screen time a part of life but not the backdrop for it. Create your own Family Responsible Use Agreement and post it on the fridge or by the computer with understandings about what, when and how long it's okay to be engaged in these activities.

6. Leave it at the door. Parents need to come home from work and transition well, too. Whatever the weather, finish your call or texting before you walk in the door. When you come home you need to connect with the people you love most in the world and show them that they matter to you by being present to greet them with your full attention. Prepare for your own transition home by letting co-workers know you won't be available at certain times. And don't walk in the door with the expectation that you'll fake it with a two-second "hi!" and then disappear to "just check" what's happened in the last 30 minutes since you left the office. Nobody is fooled. Remember: It Can Wait.

7. Make mealtimes matter: take tech off the menu. No screens or phones at the table—this includes you! Kids hate hypocrites. So do partners. You may be surprised to find how quickly cell-free meals are habit-forming.

8. Let bath and bedtime be quiet, cozy, unplugged times. At the end of their day, and our day with them, our children need to know they are precious to us and matter more than anything to us. Nothing spoils the magic of a bedtime book or chat more than a parent checking a text. The same tech-free breather goes for parents, too. No screens in the bedroom!