

Hello Everyone,

For many of the attendees at yesterday's event this training was personal. People were seeking strategies on how to encourage healthy behaviors and overall less screen time for themselves and their family members – most especially youth.

It might be helpful to first consider the world in which many of us grew up in. Those of us born before 1990 grew up with excitement and anticipation around learning how to ride a bike, listening to records and cassette tapes (and even the RADIO...what's that?!), and *happily* playing outdoors. Skip ahead to the present day and the majority of our youth (including our biological kids, let's *not* kid ourselves!) look forward to Xbox, iPhones, and Snap Chat. They have been born into a technologically advanced and tech-focused world.

And it can be dangerous.

At yesterday's presentation the presenter referred to the iPhone as a tool *and* as a weapon. Let me explain. Technological warfare is a thing. Our military and militaries across the world are using technology to communicate, to intimidate, to strategize, and in combat. Robot insects to spy on our enemies, humanoids that can move in any condition or territory, bots that can jump high to reach tops of buildings...and this is just the beginning. All remotely operated by a computer or phone. Hackers are increasingly becoming more and more savvy, Apps that track your every move and Alexa who records your every word. Having the world at our finger tips and handing that world over to an 8, 10 or 12 year old with little conversation or guidance is seemingly crazy. Yet we do it.

We call these tools a “phone” and we are kidding ourselves if we continue to believe and perceive them as such. They are tools opening up an unedited world to our youth and we expect them to be able to handle it.

The observation was shared yesterday that when we have downtime our go-to activity is our phone or some sort of electronic device. Pinterest. Facebook. Instagram. Google. Mindless scrolling and zero benefit. Our brains read things differently from devices and our patience for reading on a device is brief. We forget that reading a book is not passive, in fact for our brain it is very interactive. We are using our imagination. We are developing characters and settings in our mind. How many of you read Harry Potter and then watched the movies and thought – well that's not how I pictured Hermione?

So is it all bad? We discussed this yesterday too. It isn't all bad – of course it can't be otherwise we wouldn't be where we are at. Technology has been able to save lives. Technology has given us the opportunity to stay connected to our loved ones. Facetime and Skype allow grandparents to develop a relationship with their grandchild from across the country without ever having to travel. We certainly know the benefits. YouTube has made a fortune off of the benefits to being able to access our camera in any given moment.

What do we do from here? Like anything that we consume in excess we must regulate in moderation. There is (as I mentioned yesterday) a ‘sweet spot’ as a recent study of high school

students shows (published in the journal *Emotion*) that too much time spent on screens results in lower self-esteem, stress, depression and overall well-being. Same was reported for those students who had no access to screens/devices. The students who spent a moderate time on their devices were the happiest (estimated 2 hrs. a day). These students also had hobbies and activities that they were participating in that took them away from their screens. The key here was that they *wanted* to go and do these other things. Behaviors and interests instilled at a young age that students were still compelled to do despite the introduction of devices. Sports. Instruments. Music. Theater. Hiking...etc. Here is the [link](#) to the NPR report that covered this study and had some interesting insights into this discussion.

Here are the tips & strategies that I would like to share with you:

- Model the behavior you want yourself to be doing and those around you to do.
- Define “screens” and “screen time” – Students often will finish their 2 hour homework session that took place on their lap tops and want to wind down by scrolling through Instagram – remind them that they just spent 2 hours on a device and that now they need to pick a non-device activity to wind down with (Reading a book, bath/shower, cards or board game, drawing, writing, or baking).
- Have No-Screen zones in your house – The dining room, for example. When you eat dinner together there should be no devices allowed, this will give you an opportunity to have meaningful and fun conversations.
- Have a No-Dual Screen Rule – If there is a TV on, there should be no phone or other device being used.
- Have a No Device Rule for 24 hrs. on the same night each week – Friday night to Saturday night for example. Having this rule occur on the same night every week will give everyone consistency in expecting it – once they are used to the rule there should be less anxiety around using their devices during this time period. As a family, this will give you the opportunity to plan the nights events (game night, dinner out night, themed dinner night, fire and s’mores night, etc.)
- Talk to your child about the expectations you have for them in how they use their devices and what is not permitted. Educate them on the risks and dangers of having access to so much. Make them responsible for their use and time. Hold them accountable. Keep talking.
- Attached – please find the e-copies of the hand-outs from yesterday’s training

Feel free to reach out with any questions, feedback or additions to any of what I have shared.

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