

Praise for *Growing Up Social*

Whether you are a parent, grandparent, neighbor, or friend, *Growing Up Social* is a must-read! The electronic age has brought us the amazing miracles of television and computer technology, but it has also brought risks to the social and intellectual development of our children. This book will inform you, and perhaps even alarm you, but then it will show you how children can enjoy screens without becoming addicted to them.

—**MEL CHEATHAM, MD**, clinical professor of neurosurgery

As a mom of six children, I see now more than ever how important real connections with real people are. For those of us who grew up with corded phones and letter writing pen-pals, it's easy to worry about how the screen-driven world impacts our children. Thankfully Arlene Pellicane and Dr. Gary Chapman have provided sound advice for parents in how to train children in important relational skills, while setting realistic boundaries for electronic entertainment. Need help in teaching your children communication, care, and empathy for others? This is the book you've been looking for! Great research, sound advice, and steps to success—what could be better than that?

—**TRICIA GOYER**, *USA Today* bestselling author of 40 books, including *Lead Your Family Like Jesus*

The advent of the digital world is a technology that has created an enormous challenge for parents. It is causing our children to spend more time in front of a computer screen or smartphone than in healthy social contact, and the consequences on children's emotional health is frightening. Research here is very clear: we are rewiring the human brain in ways that will have long-term detrimental effects.

Growing Up Social is absolutely correct in its identification of the risks facing our children. It offers practical guidance and scientifically validated techniques for protecting them from the damaging consequences of prolonged digital engagement. It has my full recommendation.

—**ARCHIBALD D. HART**, author of *The Digital Invasion: How Technology is Shaping You and Your Relationships*

How do you raise children thoughtfully in a screen-centric world? It's one of the most urgent questions of our time, and *Growing Up Social* is a full of smart, practical answers. Any parent seeking to nurture their family's spiritual life in this connected age, no matter their faith or philosophy, will benefit from reading it.

—**WILLIAM POWERS**, author, *Hamlet's BlackBerry*

It's not too late! You can rescue your children from their technology and help them learn why and how to be social. Without social skills, they'll be miserable, lonely, confused, angry, misled, depressed, unfulfilled. You know it's a huge issue today and I'm glad you're concerned. In *Growing Up Social*, Chapman and Pellicane share ideas that will equip you to have instructive conversations with your kids and make realistic and significant changes so they willingly decrease their screen time and confidently increase their friend time.

—**KATHY KOCH**, founder and president of Celebrate Kids, Inc., and author of *Finding Authentic Hope and Wholeness* and *How Am I Smart?* and coauthor of *No More Perfect Kids*

If you think your child is immune to an overdependence on screens, think again. Written by my trusted friends Gary Chapman and Arlene Pellicane this book is a reality pill that many modern day parents need to swallow.

—**DR. KEVIN LEMAN**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Have a Happy Family by Friday*

Finally a book that educates on the very real effects screen time has on our children and daily home life. *Growing Up Social* is packed with practical wisdom and brilliant suggestions to effectively and intentionally pull families trapped in isolation away from their screens to reestablish God intended family time! Gary and Arlene, count me a raving fan of this much needed guide book for parents!

—**TRACEY EYSTER**, founder of FamilyLife's MomLifeToday.com, author of *Be the Mom* and *Beautiful Mess*

A timely and practical book that tackles one of parenting's biggest dilemma: how do we navigate this new world of technology? This book will equip parents to confidently set boundaries and create an atmosphere that uses technology in a healthy way.

—**TED CUNNINGHAM**, pastor and author of several books including *Trophy Child*

This book will help parents navigate the slippery slope of electronics in a way that emphasizes family bonding, social relating, and maintaining a healthy balance of electronic and non-electronic activities. A most welcome addition to the library of any intentional parent.

—**TODD CARTMELL**, child psychologist and author of *Project Dad* and *Raising Flexible Kids*

In this unprecedented age of technology and its accessibility, I cannot think of a more needed or more important resource for parents than *Growing Up Social*. While this book recognizes the positive contributions of technology, it serves as an important handbook for educating parents on the effects of too much screen time in our lives. It offers creative alternatives and encouragement to take back our home from the digital invasion and I highly recommend it!

—**KRISTEN WELCH**, author of *Rhinestone Jesus* and blogger at *We Are THAT Family*

As a mom, I have often felt outnumbered in my own home:

Laptop, iPod, smartphone, Xbox, tablet: 5 vs. Mom and Dad: 2

Besides living in a wireless bunker, what's a parent to do? *Growing Up Social* will help you reclaim your home and your family. More than a media manifesto, this book gives a common-sense, real world approach to building relationships and helping our kids who are screen savvy become socially savvy.

—**KATHI LIPP**, author of *I Need Some Help Here: Hope for When Your Kids Don't Go According to Plan* and *21 Ways to Connect with Your Kids*

Growing Up Social is a must-read for wisdom to maximize the positives and minimize the negatives of life and love in the ever-changing digital world.

—**PAM AND BILL FARREL**, co-directors of Love-Wise; authors of *Men Are Like Waffles*, *Women Are Like Spaghetti* and *10 Best Decisions a Parent Can Make*

Imagine this: A two-year-old picks up his mother's phone and swipes his finger across the screen. Not hard to imagine, is it? What's wrong with that picture? What's right? Arlene Pellicane and Dr. Gary Chapman will help you answer both of those questions. *Growing Up Social* is a must-read for today's parents and grandparents too!

—**KENDRA SMILEY**, author of *Journey of a Strong-Willed Child* and *Be the Parent* (and mother of three, grandmother of nine and counting)

growing
up.
social

raising relational kids
in a screen-driven world

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introduction:

taking back your home

Is technology bringing your family closer together, or is it driving your family farther apart?

Joseph and Amanda have three children, ages two, six, and ten. Their kids play video games and watch movies and television all day except for the time the older kids are in school. Joseph and Amanda are concerned about the amount of time their children spend in front of screens, yet they feel powerless to make a change.

“We have no guidelines,” said Joseph. “We did have guidelines but could not keep them in place.”

Can you identify with these discouraged parents? Maybe you’ve tried to limit screen time in the past, but the temper tantrums were too much to bear. We’ve heard from hundreds of parents who express their frustration with implementing digital guidelines:

“We have no rules. Our kids watch a lot of TV and play video games.”

“Screen time rules aren’t stated; they’re implied, and it’s not working.”

“I regret not having guidelines because my son missed out on socializing with people face to face. He’s in his twenties and completely engrossed with being on his computer.”

You want your adult child to have all the skills necessary to succeed in relationships. The training necessary for growing up social isn’t found on a phone or tablet. There’s no app or video game that can replace interactions with other human beings. Social skills must be practiced in real life, beginning for a child in the home.

Having a social child means your son or daughter will be able to talk to people and like people. He’ll be able to relate to others and enjoy activities with friends and family members. Being social isn’t just about making small talk in the cafeteria. It involves showing other people you care through eye contact, conversation, and empathy. The ideal place for a child to learn to be social is in his home, where a loving mother or father can model what healthy relationships look like.

Unfortunately, there is a subtle shift happening in many homes that is profoundly eroding the relationship between parent and child. The average American child and teenager spends fifty-three hours a week with media and technology, far more time in front of screens than interacting with parents or people.¹ How is a growing child supposed to learn about getting along with others when the vast majority of her time is spent with a screen?

average isn’t working

Teenagers aren’t the only demographic prone to peer pressure. Parents are just as quick to get their child the latest digital device to keep up with the family across the street. The other fourth graders have cellphones, so you get your daughter one too. If the other kids are playing a particular violent video game, what’s the harm in your son joining in? You wouldn’t want him to feel left out! Or maybe you feel bad about plunking your

toddler in front of the screen for a few hours each day, but at least all the other kids are watching the same programs.

It doesn't take much effort to join the digital crowd and entertain your children with what makes them happy (and quiet). We surveyed hundreds of parents about their families and screens. Many reported that screens ran their children's lives, yet they were not concerned. One parent said, "My children can watch as much as they want, usually four to five hours a day. I am not concerned, and I don't think it's affected our family dynamic."

The presence of screens in the home is so widely accepted that many parents don't even consider them a threat to strong family relationships. Let us take a moment to assure you that this is not an antitechnology book. Technology is here to stay, and we believe you can find positive ways to utilize it for your relationships. No doubt your child is going to use emails, texts, and smartphones as he grows into an adult. These are amazing days when you can videoconference Grandma in a different country in real time. But if you don't minimize and monitor the screens in your child's life, when your son finally meets Grandma face to face, he may not know how to simply sit and visit.

Screens are not the problem; the problem lies in the way we constantly use them. When your child has free time, what's his default activity? For the average family, free time equals screen time. It's one experience to gather around the television to watch a DVD with your family. This is intentional screen time that can bring a family closer. It's another experience to click through channels mindlessly day after day. Screen time that is not purposeful tends to be a waste of time and negative influence.

If the average family is glued to screens, texts instead of talks, and uses phones while eating together at restaurants, who wants to be average? The digital norm does not appear to be producing healthy, relationally rich children. Screens aren't anything new; parents may have watched a lot of television while growing up. But our televisions were big and

bulky, fixed on a piece of furniture. Phone calls were limited to the house because the phone was strapped to the wall or you couldn't get reception past the garage on a cordless.

Today we carry screens *in our pockets* wherever we go. Screens have moved out of the background into the foreground—for adults and for children as well. Pixels instead of people take center stage for the average American family. Children are like wet cement, and nowadays most are being imprinted by screens, not by parents.

It doesn't have to be this way.

no more good intentions

Many well-intentioned parents say things like:

“Life is busy; I don't have time to enforce screen-time rules.”

“I couldn't get my spouse to back up what I was doing.”

“My kids threw a fit when I tried to make a change.”

“It's so hard to be consistent.”

Nina has three daughters, ages two, four, and six. The girls were watching five hours of cartoons every day. Dinner was centered on the television, and Nina knew the lack of family time wasn't good. She attempted to turn off the television for mealtimes and in the early evening.

But after only a few nights of success, life got especially busy and Nina pretended not to notice when the girls turned on the television after dinner. Before long, the girls were back on the couch, watching television on most evenings.

Good intentions will not get you anywhere as a parent. Author Andy Andrews writes,

Despite popular belief to the contrary, there is absolutely no power in intention. The seagull may intend to fly away, may decide to do so, may talk with the other seagulls about how wonderful it is to fly, but until the seagull flaps his wings and takes to the air, he is still on the dock.

There's no difference between that gull and all the others. Likewise, there is no difference in the person who intends to do things differently and the one who never thinks about it in the first place. Have you ever considered how often we judge ourselves by our intentions while we judge others by their actions? Yet intention without action is an insult to those who expect the best from you.²

We share these powerful and convicting words about the difference between good intentions and actions to appeal to you to read this book for ideas you will *use*. We don't expect you to agree with every idea presented in *Growing Up Social*. But we hope you will take the ideas that resonate with you and put them into practice.

No matter how smart screens get, your child's natural curiosity is best matched with a caring parent who will help him understand his world. Let's go back to the question we started with: *Is technology bringing your family closer together, or is it driving your family farther apart?* Believe it or not, you can make positive changes that will influence your child for the rest of his life. The journey to taking back your home from screens starts now.

*“The more a child is involved in screen time,
the less time there is for interaction with parents,
siblings, and friends.”* —DR. GARY CHAPMAN

chapter one

screen time: too much, too soon?

Fifteen-month-old Lily sits in the shopping cart, eyes fixed on her iPad. Her mom shops along the grocery store aisle with minimal interruptions. Lily never looks up to see the bright red apples or the shelf where her beloved Cheerios are grandly displayed.

Every weekday, third grader Jason flips on the television after school. The TV stays on for five hours until he goes to bed.

Melissa is a junior in high school. Last month, she sent 3,500 text messages (that's about 110 texts per day).

These are not unusual scenarios. They have become the norm in a child's screen-driven world. No wonder parents consider how to balance the use of technology with everyday life. Moms, dads, and grandparents are asking, "Dr. Chapman, my children are on the phone or playing video games constantly. We don't have family time anymore. When we tell them we're going to do something as a family, they argue and head back

to their screens.”

Remember what life was like before smartphones, flat screens, and tablets? Before the digital age, children went out in the yard and played, creating their own games or engaging in endless rounds of freeze tag or hide-and-seek. Kids learned to interact. They had to deal with winning and losing, getting kicked by a neighbor, and being empathetic to a friend who got hurt. Boys and girls learned how the real world works through playing with one another. Yet most children today are indoors for the bulk of their free time. Children aren't allowed to roam outside as they once were because of the fear of kidnapping and other societal dangers. So they stay indoors, often engaged with a screen instead of a person. Unfortunately, the more a child is involved in screen time, the less time there is for interaction with parents, siblings, and friends.

plugged in too soon?

screen time for children under two

The temptation to use screens to entertain babies and toddlers is stronger than ever. With our homes, vehicles, and smartphones, we are surrounded by media. Not only are screens ever-present, a parent almost feels *obligated* to utilize the latest, greatest educational software.

But research and our personal experience say the less exposure your little one has to screens, the better. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that parents avoid television viewing and screen time for children under the age of two.¹ The AAP believes the negative effects of media use far outweigh the positive ones for this age group. Despite the luminous claims of educational videos and software, little evidence supports educational or developmental benefits from media use by children younger than two years. You'd never know that, based on the glut of electronic educational products geared toward making smart babies and toddlers!

Young children grow by discovering the world. They need to experi-

ence a three-dimensional world of people and things they can taste, touch, see, hear, and smell. This foundational exploration can't happen if a baby or toddler spends a lot of time using electronics. Children are walking at two, which means they are going to get into trouble—that's normal and healthy. They learn which doors are okay to open and which doors stay shut. They're developing motor skills as they walk up and down stairs. During this important developmental stage, screen time hinders more than it helps.

The AAP actually reports adverse health effects of direct media use as well as parental media use (background media) in the life of a young child. Because of their early stage of cognitive development, children under two years of age process information differently from older children. Two studies have found that watching a program like *Sesame Street* has a negative—not positive—effect on language development for children younger than two years.² While you may think a television show or phone app is teaching your baby the ABCs, media use has not been proven to promote language skills in little ones. Young children learn language best when it's presented by a live person and not on a screen.

A study from 2007 reported that 90 percent of parents allow their children younger than two years to watch some form of electronic media.³ Thirty-nine percent of families with infants and young children have a television on at least six hours per day⁴—with negative effects. Studies show that while television may be background noise for the child, it often moves to the foreground for the parent. A child's ability to learn language is directly related to the amount of talk time he or she has with a parent. When the television is on, Mom or Dad is less likely to engage in conversation, resulting in a smaller vocabulary for that child.

Researchers examined twelve-, twenty-four-, and thirty-six-month-olds and found that background television not only reduced the length of time a child played, but it also reduced the child's focused attention during play.⁵ Other studies suggest that background media might interfere

with cognitive processing, memory, and reading comprehension. In spite of these negative effects, almost one-third of children have a television in their bedroom by age three.⁶ It isn't wise for any child, regardless of age, to have a television in her own room (more about that in chapter 11). Many young children use the television as a sleep aid, even though television viewing before falling asleep is associated with irregular sleep schedules and poor sleep habits that affect mood, behavior, and learning.

The best alternative to watching a video with your young child is cuddling up and reading a book. As your child is exposed to books, his or her vocabulary will grow. Becoming a great reader begins with listening, so read aloud and often to your son or daughter.

What if you've allowed your young child to watch television, but now you want to pull back? Melissa, a mother of children ages two and four, wants to do the right thing for her children's development, but she wonders how to get dinner on the table without the help of the television to keep her kids occupied. On the next page are a few ideas to help replace screen time with project time.

It takes effort to switch from the convenience of screen time to an interactive or tactile activity for a child. But the benefits for your son's or daughter's development are well worth it. You will be pleasantly surprised at how quickly your child adjusts to new screen-free routines.

plugged in too much?

Eight-year-old Trevor asked the question for the hundredth time, "Mom, all my friends have a video game player. Why won't you let me get one?"

"Just because all your friends have one doesn't mean it's a good idea for you," answered his mom.

Although Donna had been able to ward off her son's request for two years, she began to wonder if it might be the right time to say yes. After all, Trevor was a good student. She decided to surprise him with a video game console for Christmas.

Scribbling. Place big pieces of butcher paper on the floor and give your child a box of crayons. An eighteen-month-old can hold a crayon and scribble. Scribbling helps your toddler to develop a tripod position of the hand for drawing and writing, a needed skill your child will not learn from swiping a screen.

Cardboard Box.

Keep a large cardboard box your toddler can climb in and out of. Add some crayons if your child wants to decorate it.

Special Cupboard. Fill a cupboard your child can reach with plastic cups and plates, measuring cups, spoons, and bowls. This could also be your Tupperware cupboard. Let your child use this cupboard only when you're making meals to make it a special activity when you're in the kitchen.

Water Fun. If you have a tile floor that can handle it, fill a bowl with an inch or two of water. Give your child some measuring cups or spoons along with a few toys that will float or sink.

MAGIC TOY BOX. Take a plastic bin and fill it with toys your child hasn't played with for a while. Give her the bin with great fanfare. Change the contents every week to add an element of surprise. Your child will actually play with these toys instead of letting them go to waste.

Jumping Beans. This one is messier, but give your child a large pan filled with dry beans, measuring cups, and funnels. Put out a cookie sheet so your child can make designs with the beans.

It didn't take long for Trevor to adapt to having his own gaming system at his fingertips. During most of his free time, he played video games. On the car ride home from school, he gave short answers to his mom's questions about the day, all the while playing his video game. Donna began to wonder if she had made a mistake.