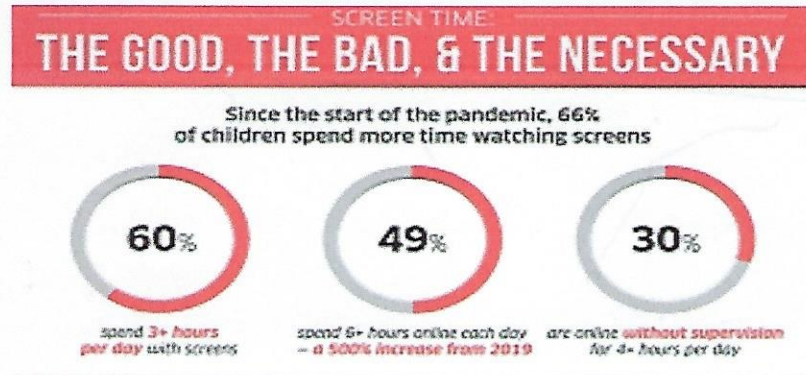


Summer Screen Time & How Parents Can Reset Children's Technology Habits After the Pandemic



It would be difficult to find even one parent who has not utilized technology for their child to help get them through the Pandemic. Don't feel guilty. We did whatever we had to do that worked at the time. Technology usage has soared since the pandemic and continues to. Technology offered our kids a lifeline to continue socializing and feeling connected with the world that was suddenly taken from them. Technology also brought on more and more conflict and arguments on how much is enough. With summer being upon us and the gradual return to pre-Pandemic life, this could be time to make long term adjustments.

The Million Dollar Questions - Summer Screen Time How Much is Ok?

The answer depends on many factors such as the lifestyle the family leads, parent work schedules, summer expectations, the number of activities the child already has, the type of screen time the child utilizes, the personality and age of the child and the response the child elicits when it's time to turn off technology.

Determining HOW technology will contribute to a balanced summer life and priorities rather than identifying specific amounts of time, may be a more positive way to answer this question. Find an opportunity to have a conversation with your child to involved him in setting up the guidelines. When a child feels more a part of the decision making, he will be more likely to follow the guidelines that they helped create. Attempt to find solutions which will work for both parent

AND the child. This collaborative problem solving method can greatly reduce conflict and help the child take ownership and accountability.

Here are important factors to consider and decide on **AHEAD OF TIME**:

- Ask “what are two things you’d like to accomplish this summer”?
- Determine what needs to happen daily **before** screen time can be used and be as consistent as possible i.e., morning exercise, summer bridge work, home tasks etc... Provide devices **after** completion.
- Green time vs Screen time as physical outdoor activity and creativity is a must. The Online world has made Green time not as appealing to kids anymore. It’s important to



change this.

- Identify activities of interest that do not include electronics – make a list. (see *Atlantaparent.com 50 Ways to Entertain Kids Without Electronics*)
- Identify screen free times and places such as the dinner table or in the car where rich communication is likely to occur without the presence of electronics.
- Allow your child to be bored and let them find activities on their own to increase their creativity.
- Identify cut off times for technology in the evening and whether devices will be turned in nightly. The blue light from technology suppresses melatonin which is the natural chemical our body produces to promote sleep. Kids who stay up too late using technology are becoming wired and tired. Interactive screen time should end two (2) hours prior to bed and passive can be thirty (30) minutes before bed.
- The Internet has no end or stops. It is infinite so kids need help finding this hard stop.
- Schedule daily outdoor play and exercise time.
- Make a Summer Screen Time Check Off Chart for kids to check off the daily expectations.
- Have summer projects – learning to cook, building or creating.

Differentiate between the different types of screen time:

Passive – Includes listening to music, watching tv and movies – often this type can include the family.

Interactive - Gaming and social media is interactive and should be monitored.

Communication/Social Media- Kids/teens want to stay connected to their friends. They see this means as a vital way of belonging to a group.

Content Creation/Making Digital Art: Creating movies thru iMovie, writing music thru Garage Band. These medias can be an avenue to encourage creativity and innovation AND family involvement.

Delay Usage for Young Children

For young children, delay access to electronics. The longer the child goes without electronics, the more time the child has to develop the important developmental skills during the critical years of development such as language, attention, concentration, close relationships and empathy. Many well-meaning parents provide electronics to children to provide an educational edge, this type of play can actually reduce the abilities parents are using electronics for.



TECHNO TANTRUMS

ESS (Electronic Screen Syndrome) or Techno Tantrums.

Symptoms include irritability, quick emotional responses, rages, over focus on screens, lack of focus in other areas, social/emotional dysregulation, sleep disturbances and social anxiety.

Most of the time, this reaction is not your child being manipulative, but his nervous system being overly stimulated.

Here's an explanation of why this happens:

Dopamine- Gaming and technology can easily bombard our nervous systems. The neurotransmitter dopamine which is the 'pleasure system' of the brain, becomes highly activated during gaming. Dopamine provides feelings of enjoyment motivating us to do or continue doing particular activities. When screens are in use this pathway of the brain can be activated making it very difficult for the child to stop gaming.

Overloaded nervous and sensory systems also impact the child's ability to stop gaming when asked. Online gaming is fast paced with many sensory components which can put a child into a hyperarousal state. A tantrum may occur as a result of the sensory system regulating itself after being on overload.

Physiological State of Flow We all have a physiology state of flow. When children are engrossed in an online activity, perhaps they're focused on a video game creating or interacting in Minecraft or Roblox, watching a suspenseful movie, or especially if they're expending a significant amount of mental effort in what they are engaged in, they often enter the state of flow. This is where time seems to stand still, and they are completely immersed in what they're doing. This state of flow is disrupted when they're asked to switch off a screen and they're often left feeling frustrated as a result. This is where a Techno Tantrum may occur.

The Brain is primed for novelty- the prefrontal cortex, which is the part of the brain responsible for managing our impulses and some of our other higher-order thinking skills, has a novelty bias. This means that it is wired for novelty and the online world offers an endless supply of sensory seductions that cater to this novelty. And so our kids (and us too) can get caught in the "compulsion loop", where we constantly scan for new information.

We also know that time in the offline world doesn't offer the same levels or types of novelty. Nature doesn't offer the same type of sensory stimulation that the online world offers- it's much slower! So the novelty factor is yet another reason why kids are often captivated by the online world and find it difficult to switch off.

(For more on this explanation see drkristygoodwin.com)

How to Help:

Have firm rules around how long your child can use devices and then stick to these rules (even when they combust into the techno-tantrum because over time these will diminish if we're consistent with our rules). And most importantly, have these conversations about rules **before** the device is switched on. An unexpected consequence or "new rule" will heighten the emotional dysregulation. While parenting flexibility is important, this is not the time to be flexible as the child may see your flexibility as a loophole or may mistake your flexibility as the rules not being expected. Post the rules in a common area and direct often to the rules when requests come up.

Model what you would like to see from your child. A fun way to do this is by actually playing the online game with your child. This will provide a means to connect with your child, understand the concept of the game and how the game can be tricky for the child to stop playing. Then while playing, begin the process of ending the game with the child and work through kinks you see in the process.



Help your child learn to play different games at different times. Starting a long game which can usually immerses the child before dinner would not be a good idea, but a quicker less mentally captivating game would be better. Discuss these different types of game with your child and help him make these determinations with your help.

Have visual and audio timers so the child will see time passing and how much time he has left not just what the time is. Provide 15-minute transition time for the child to be cued that screen time is approaching an end. Utilize automatic timers so the computer can do the policing, not you as the parent. Let the child know that the game or device will turn off at the specific time. If the child gets angry, redirect to the rules that were stated and validate that you know it is difficult, but the rules will remain.

When allowing screen time, setting a game amount may be more helpful than a specific time for some children i.e., you can watch two episodes or play two games. Not all online game type allows for this format, but it is helpful to quantify rather than set arbitrary time limits for some children.

If a child engages in aggression surrounding screen time, when the child is calm, let the child know that under any circumstance will aggressive behavior be accepted. If the child hits, throws or comes after you, this is a sign that either the type of game which is being played, when it is being played or the amount of time playing the game is not appropriate for the child's development. Let the child know that

if this behavior happens, the device will be eliminated. The child should be able to watch television or passive types of electronics, however; the gaming device will be withheld for a set period of time (24 hours perhaps). The game or the device can either be gradually reintroduced or the specific game can be eliminated and replaced with less sensory activating games until the child is able to demonstrate accepts of the rules with other games which may provide less sensory activation. This should be specifically addressed explicitly when developing technology rules.

Do not argue with the child during a Techno Tantrum, the goal is to return to a level of calm. Do not attempt to physically take the device away when child is in a rage. The device can either be manually turned off or wait until the child is calm and then reinforce the consequence of aggression. This will take patience and you may have to wait until the child calms on his own. It is better to let the behavior go for the moment than to escalate the situation by forcing compliance.

Avoid screen multitasking – one electronic at a time.

Be the Model You Want Your Child to Be. Children learn from their parents. Kids won't respect the rules if parents aren't leading by example. When a child sees the parent put the phone down or not answer a call at dinner, the child learns to respect the rules. Do what you are asking your child to do.

Books for Further Reading:

Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction is Hijacking Our Kids and How to Break the Trance.

Nicholas Kardaras

Reset Your Child's Brain: A Four-Week Plan to End Meltdowns, Raise Grades and Boost Social Skills by Reversing the Effects of Electronic Screen time.

Victoria L. Dunckley

Disconnected: How to Reconnect Our Digital Distracted Kids.

Thomas Kersting

Parentsandcarersatwork.com