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ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

BE THE DIGITAL ROLE MODEL YOUR CHILD NEEDS.

As parents, we're often concerned about how best to teach our children good digital habits, but we sometimes forget that one of the most powerful lessons we can offer is through our own behaviours. Our kids are watching, absorbing, and mimicking how we use technology, even if they won't admit it (especially in their teenage years). We are, especially in the pre-teen years, their most influential guides when it comes to navigating the digital world, and what we do speaks louder than any words we say.

The Messages We Send.

When you're scrolling through your phone as your child is telling you about their day, what message are you sending? Or if you're checking your phone during family dinner, what are they learning about presence and connection? These small, everyday actions shape how they view smartphone use and relationships.

As parents, we sometimes underestimate how much our children take from our digital habits. We tell them to limit screen time, to be present, or to have meaningful conversations, but when our actions don't align, we send mixed messages. Even teens, who might seem like they don't care what we think, are taking cues from us about how adults use technology.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words.

It's not just about setting rules or boundaries for our children, it's about walking the walk. If we want them to develop healthy digital habits and to thrive, we need to show them what that looks like. Here are more ways to lead by example:

- **Be Present:** When your child is talking to you, put your phone down. Show them that they have your full attention and teach them the value of being fully engaged with others.

- **Device-Free Zones:** Establish areas or times where phones are off-limits, like during meals or family time. If you want your child to respect this, it starts with you.

- **Sleep Without It:** Leaving your phone out of the bedroom at night can model healthier habits for your child, encouraging them to disconnect at bedtime for better sleep and well-being.

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- **Turn Off Notifications:** Show your child that not every alert demands immediate attention. You can also say something like, 'I'll check that later,' modelling that you're in control of your phone, not the other way around.

- **Avoid the Urge to Check:** When you're spending time with family, resist the urge to constantly check your phone. Show your kids that you don't need to be constantly connected and that being present with them matters more.

- **Balance Online and Offline Life:** Schedule intentional tech-free times for everyone in the family. Go for a walk, play a game, complete and activity together, or just sit and talk. Balance is key, and kids learn best when they see it in action.

By being mindful of our actions, we're teaching our children that technology is a tool to be used thoughtfully, rather than something that demands and deserves our constant attention.

Model Positive Uses of Technology.

It's not all about putting the phone away. Technology can be a wonderful tool for learning, creativity, and connection when used with purpose. Show your child that digital devices can be used to expand their minds and spark their creativity – not just for doom scrolling! Whether you're reading an article, learning something new, creating a digital photo album, or exploring an app, you can involve your child in these positive uses of technology.

Encourage your child to use technology to explore their passions, whether it's gaming, making music, or creating and editing videos. Be their partner in this discovery, learn and create alongside them. This not only helps them build a healthy relationship with technology but also strengthens your connection with them.

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Why It Matters.

Children, especially tweens and teens, are at a critical stage of developing habits that will carry into adulthood. When we model mindful, balanced use of technology, we help them internalise these practices. On the flip side, if we're constantly glued to our phones, they might come to see that as normal and acceptable behaviour.

By being aware of our own habits and making conscious changes, we can empower our kids to do the same. It's not about being perfect but about striving to show our children how to use technology in ways that enhance life rather than distract from it.

When We Don't Get It Right.

Let's face it, we're all only human, and there are times when we don't get it right. Maybe your child catches you scrolling through your phone when you've just told them they need to cut down on their screen time, or perhaps they point out that you're checking your phone at dinner when you've said it's a no-phone zone. It's easy to feel defensive or make excuses, but these moments are a chance to model something even more important, accountability.

When your child points out an inconsistency, it's an opportunity to show them that you're willing to listen, reflect, and make a change. After all, that's exactly what we want them to do when we pick them up on things, right? By acknowledging the slip-up, you're demonstrating that no one is perfect, and that growth happens when we're open to feedback, even from our kids.

So instead of reacting defensively, try saying, 'You're right. I didn't stick to what I said, and I'll work on it." This simple admission not only shows that you value their perspective but also teaches them how to handle mistakes with humility and grace. It's a powerful way to reinforce the very lessons you're trying to instil, taking responsibility, learning from slip-ups, and making positive changes.

You've got this!

It isn't about beating yourself up for checking your phone at the wrong time. We live in a hyper-connected world, and sometimes we all slip. The key is to recognise the power you have as a role model and embrace it. You are a crucial influence in how your child will learn to manage technology, not through lectures or rules alone, but through how you navigate your own digital life.

Take the opportunity to model thoughtful, intentional smartphone use. You'll be setting your child up for success in the digital world, helping them build the skills and habits they'll need long into the future.

As parents, we have an incredible opportunity to shape our children's digital habits in a way that helps them thrive. By being mindful of how we use technology ourselves, we can set the tone for balanced, intentional, and creative use of smartphones and other devices. It's not about being perfect, it's about being present and purposeful. With small, consistent actions, you can show your child that technology is a powerful tool, meant to enhance life, not distract from it. Together, you can navigate the digital world with confidence, building healthy habits that will serve them well into the future. You've got this!

Checklist: How to Model Good Smartphone Use and Digital Habits.

1. Be Present:
- Put your phone down and give your full attention when your child is talking to you.
- Establish phone-free zones or times, such as during meals or family time.

2. Lead by Example:
- Turn off notifications or put your phone on silent to show that you're not ruled by alerts.
- Avoid checking your phone immediately when it buzzes—model patience and control.
- Keep your phone out of the bedroom at night to promote healthy bedtime habits.

3. Balance Screen Time and Offline Life:
- Set regular screen-free times for the whole family to disconnect and engage in other activities.
- Demonstrate a balanced approach to technology by limiting your own screen time during family moments.

4. Model Positive Uses for Technology:
- Involve your child in learning or creative activities using technology, like making videos, digital art, or exploring educational apps together.
- Show them that technology can be used for more than entertainment—it can inspire creativity and growth.

5. Acknowledge When You Slip Up:
- If your child points out that you're not following your own advice, listen and accept their feedback.
- Use it as an opportunity to show that it's okay to make mistakes and to make adjustments.
- Model the behavior you want to see in them: admitting mistakes and learning from them.

6. Master Technology, Don't Let It Master You:
- Show your kids that it's possible to be in control of your phone use.
- Remind them, and yourself, that not every notification or alert needs immediate attention.