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Tech-free dinners and no smartphones past 10 pm — how Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Mark Cuban limited their kids' screen time

Sarah Berger | @sarahelizberger | 1:30 PM ET Tue, 5 June 2018



The Silicon Valley superstars and tech titans who have changed how we use technology also limit their kids' screen time. And it could be with good reason.

Among those who have limited how much tech their kids consume are Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, tech billionaire Mark Cuban and Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian. And although Apple CEO Tim Cook doesn't have kids, he's voiced similar ideas when it comes to his nephew.

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Dinnertime at the Jobs' house, for example, was used as an opportunity to have real discussions with his children. Jobs had three kids — Reed, 26; Erin, 22; and Eve, 20 — with wife Laurene Powell, as well as daughter Lisa Brennan, 40, from a previous relationship.

"Every evening Steve made a point of having dinner at the big long table in their kitchen, discussing books and history and a variety of things," Walter Isaacson, author of "Steve Jobs" told the New York Times in 2014. "No one ever pulled out an iPad or computer. The kids did not seem addicted at all to devices."

Gates has [revealed](#) that he often limits how much screen time his youngest child gets before bed, and banned cell phones until his kids were in their teens. Bill and Melinda Gates have three children: Jennifer, 22; Rory, 19; and Phoebe, 15.

"We don't have cell phones at the table when we are having a meal, we didn't give our kids cell phones until they were 14 and they complained other kids got them earlier," Gates tells the Mirror.



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Billionaire Mark Cuban is stealthier when it comes to how he manages his kids' screen time. Cuban has three kids — Alexis, 13; Alyssa, 11; and Jake, 8.

In an interview on [The Thrive Global Podcast](#), the star of ABC's "Shark Tank" says that he makes Alexis turn in her phone at 10 p.m. during the week and 11 p.m. on the weekends, unless she has a friend over. In that case, he's still figured out a way to monitor tech time.

"I have installed Cisco routers ... I have management software. So, it says what apps they're using so I can shut off their phone activity," Cuban says. "I'm sneaky as can be. And she hates it. That's the downside of having a geeky dad, you know. I can figure all this stuff out."



Photo by Jeff Kravitz

Billionaire Mark Cuban with his wife, Tiffany Stewart (L), and kids, Alyssa Cuban, Alexis Sofia Cuban, and Jake Cuban (L to R).

He also admitted to paying his son to not watch Minecraft videos.

"I'm not going to lie, I paid my son \$150 to not watch those videos for two months," said Cuban. "But he could earn if he watched math videos, or did math problems for me, he could earn time to watch Minecraft videos."

Then, there's Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian, who, in September, had daughter Alexis with his wife, Serena Williams. In April, Ohanian revealed to CNBC that the pair plans to limit their daughter's screen time.

"My wife and I both want her to be bored," Ohanian [tells CNBC](#). "My wife

and I both want her to know what it's like to have limits on tech...I do look forward to playing video games with her when she's older, but it's really important that she gets time to just be with her thoughts and be with her blocks and be with her toys, so we'll be regulating it pretty heavily."

And while Apple CEO Tim Cook does not have children of his own, he's been outspoken about children's technology and social media use.

"I don't have a kid, but I have a nephew that I put some boundaries on," Cook [said](#), according to The Guardian. Cook's nephew is [about 13](#).

"There are some things that I won't allow; I don't want them on a social network."

Perhaps these tech titans are on to something.

The use of tech devices by kids is on the rise. For example, [Common Sense Media](#) found that among 0 to 8 year-olds, the amount of time spent on mobile media devices per day has climbed from an average of five minutes in 2011 to 48 minutes in 2017.

But studies have shown that too much technology use can hamper a child's well-being. [A 2014 report](#), published in Computers in Human Behavior, studied pre-teens who spent five days in a nature camp without access to screens. They showed improved comprehension of nonverbal, emotional cues. Too much screen time may also have negative physical effects on a child; previous research has associated [TV-watching with obesity](#) and [excessive screen time](#) with psychological difficulties.

The American Pediatrics Association also [recommends](#) setting limits. And setting a few for yourself too [might just boost your happiness](#).

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Sarah Berger

Writer for CNBC Make It



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