

“We must establish a level of moderation or balance as we make use of these many wonderful technological advances.”



The American Academy of Pediatrics maintains that children under the age of two should not be exposed to television or video for two major reasons. Firstly, the baby's brain is still developing and we do not yet fully understand what happens when that brain is exposed to too much television stimuli. Second, the AAP is concerned that television will get in the way of child-parent bonding. What we know absolutely is that the most important thing that happens in the first couple of years of a child's life is the deep connection they develop with their parents. Premature exposure and overexposure to technology creates emotional numbness, confusion between fantasy and reality, and pent-up anxiety that leads to aggressive behavior in children.

What to do:

The key to managing kids' technology use is to establish clear “unplugged” zones/times. This means recognizing times when the present moment is the priority and technology is given a secondary role. Kids need to learn that there are times when paying attention to and interacting with those around you is of primary importance, no matter what type of urgent phone calls or instant messages might be coming our way.

This means parents need to practice what they preach! If mom and dad have a difficult time disconnecting from technology, then kids will not see the need to disconnect either. **Parents set the tone when it comes to limiting technology.** How often have you seen parents using cell phones on the way to dropoff or pickup their children? They are absorbed in their own virtual world and pay no attention to their children's departure and reunion at the end of the day.

Technology Addiction:

With cell phones, BlackBerries, pagers, IM and email, personal technology users of all ages can find themselves in a constant state of alertness created by a demand for always-on communications. Whether you are 8 or 88, medical experts say **personal technology addiction is real -- and it's not pretty.** Psychologists have officially classified technology addiction as an impulse disorder that can be as socially devastating as alcoholism, gambling, sex and drug addiction. Technology addictions can interfere with both your social and occupational life. Like other addictions, there are warning signs along the road to personal technology addiction, especially on the computer. Those signs include:

- An inability to predict the amount of time you spend on the computer /cell phone/video games
- A sense of euphoria while using the computer/video games

- Lying to employers and family about computer activity
 - Withdrawal from real life hobbies and social interactions
 - Health issues such as carpal tunnel syndrome, eye strain, weight gain and backaches.
- Behavioral addictions are characterized by compulsiveness. You can't go without it and using it is causing you trouble.** If personal technology use is interfering with the normal activities of life, then it could be classified as an addiction.

Some Recommendations:

- *Establish “unplugged times”.
- *No cell phones at the table, this means mom and dad too! Do not answer calls while you are sharing time with your family.
- *Set aside a block of time to check your emails, return calls and update your face book, and adhere to this time frame.
- *Do not use handheld devices while driving, pull over if you must take that call or return that text this instant.
- *Play video and computer games with your kids, you need to know what they are being exposed to.
- *Check their cell phones-yes check them! They are children and need your supervision to navigate the overwhelming technology available to them.
- *Social networking should not be allowed before the teenage years (High School) and even then, with supervision. If your child is on Face book or My Space you must have access to their account and logs.

I can remember my grandmother often saying that “too much of a good thing isn't good”. She was right! We must establish a level of moderation or balance as we make use of these many wonderful technological advances. Remember that personal interactions are the most important development tool for our kids. Talking with people, spending time together face-to-face, without technological interference; these are the things that will help them develop meaningful and rewarding relationships as they grow.

The purpose of this column is to provide you with some “tools” that can be used in a variety of households and situations. I encourage you to adapt what you have learned to meet your needs and the needs of your individual family. If you have any questions about this topic, or have a suggestion for another article, please contact me: Heidi Kiebler-Brogan, M.A., Licensed Professional Counselor at I. E. Counseling 908-456-1871, or email me at hkbrogan@iecounseling.com.

DO YOU HAVE THE “WRITE” STUFF?
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