7 ways to cut your kids' screen time
(without making yourself crazy!)

There is a great deal of research indicating the benefits of limited screen time for kids.

The American Pediatrics Association warns that too much technology time can lead to problems ranging from eating disorders to obesity and from attention struggles to school difficulties. The Mayo Clinic links an excess of screen time to sleep issues, behavioral problems and lack of active play.

But, as parents, we also believe in balance.

We understand that parenting can be hard, and navigating technology can be a huge struggle with kids. And if we are being honest, many of our kids beg us to use the iPad, play on the smart phone, or watch Curious George for the 30th time.

We get it.

Technology is an everyday part of our life. And that's okay. It's okay to embrace it. Many of our kids already know how to use our devices better than we do.

But, there are certainly a lot of good reasons to limit screen time. Here are a few tips about how to do this in your own home - without going crazy in the process.

Establish screen-free zones.

"The most important thing is to set limits and be consistent," explains Jamie Nordling, Ph.D., social developmental psychologist and assistant professor at Augustana University. "Then your child knows what to expect." Think about where you want your child using devices and where you'd like to avoid televisions, tablets and apps.

For some parents, bedrooms and playrooms are natural tech-free zones. These are where books and toys prevail. By removing all screens from these areas, children won't expect to watch movies or play on a tablet.

Establish screen-free times.

Like creating screen-free areas in your home, it's also a good idea to schedule tech time into your day. For example, make dinnertime to bedtime technology-free. During this time, you can simply be together - eating dinner, playing games, taking baths, and reading books.

Creating routines and rituals with your kids makes them feel safe and loved, so work technology into your day.

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Find the best technology for your child.

If there's one thing most experts agree - it's that as a parent, you know your child best. Trust your judgement. Just like there's no one-size-fits-all approach to parenting, there's also no one-size-fits-all approach to technology.

In fact, even two different children in the same household could need different amounts and types of screen time.

"If you have a good relationship with your children," says Jamie, "you'll know them well enough to make good decisions for them."

Replace screen time with other fun activities.

If you are struggling to limit time in front of the television or playing video games, try putting yourself in your child's shoes. Kids will be much more amiable to cutting out screen time if it's replaced with other activities they enjoy.

Plus, there are some things that a screen simply can't replicate. A three-year-old could probably use an app to build a castle with virtual bricks, but it's not the same as constructing a tower out of blocks or assembling something with a toy hammer and nails.

Getting kids' minds off technology may also mean engaging in activities with them. Introduce a new puzzle, game or toy. And for younger kids, rotating toys can be a good way to keep everything fresh and fun. And don't forget the joy of reading books with your kids.

Cut back your technology use, too.

If you are always on your phone or watching television, it's likely that your children will mimic this behavior. Set an example with your own technology use.

A few ideas to make this happen:

- Start a challenge with your entire family - everyone puts the device down for designated time periods (or one night at a week).
- When everyone gets home, have a drop area to stow away electronic devices.
- Set an example about when it's never okay to use electronic devices - in the car, for example.
- At dinnertime, make sure everyone turns off their devices.

Focus on quality.

While there are expert guidelines for quantity of technology use in children, think about WHAT your children are watching as much as HOW LONG they are doing so.

Technology can be a wonderfully engaging way to learn, if you think about the content.

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- When watching television, choose shows that provide rich learning opportunities (and those that may limit commercials).
- For apps, choose those that help improve skills and increase knowledge over those created for pure entertainment value.
- As a caregiver, engage with your children when using technology. Keep a close eye over what they are doing and ask questions.

There are a lot of ways to use technology in an interactive and educational way.

Keep them safe.

As always, keeping kids safe while using technology is something we should all be concerned about, and the internet and virtual world are full of their own dangers. Be sure to monitor what your children are doing with technology and always, always ask questions about who they are playing games with and interacting with online.

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Being a caregiver is not an easy job. Sometimes, technology can make it easier - and even help enrich a child's life through education and entertainment.

But there are many of us who are trying to find a balance - to keep our kids active, healthy, learning and engaged - with and without television and various devices. All of the devices can overstimulate kids, so try a few of these tactics to limit technology use in your home.

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Originally posted on the Now What? Blog 4/15/15. The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to
1. *Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention*
2. *Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse*
3. *Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors*

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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