

## How to Consider Screen Time Limits...for Parents

Parents have never had their attention split in so many directions.

Since smartphones were introduced 10 years ago, parents now experience many aspects of their life—work, friends, news, shopping—through these small handheld computers. Not only do parents seek out information from smartphones, but these interactive devices ping for parents' attention as well. While mobile technologies have certainly made some things easier, research also suggests that they create more demands than parents had in the first place: more emails, more feeds to check, more games to play if we want to finish our streak!

Research shows that parents see their smartphones as sources of stress as well as stress relief, depending on how they are used. When parents are engaging their smartphones, they talk less to their children, respond slower (if at all) to their bids for attention, overreact in response to these interruptions, and in the long run, this may lead to worse child behavior and more parenting stress.

Why is this? When screen media such as television and smartphones interrupt social interactions, it is harder to read your children's behavior and thinking. Parents get more focused on the virtual interaction compared with the people in their physical space, which makes it hard to share a common perspective with those around us. Even when a smartphone is on the table, adults delve into less rich conversations and feel less empathy for other people.

However, when parents use smartphones for social support, shared enjoyment with their children, or to get things done faster so they can return to family time, they report seeing smartphones as a positive force in their lives. In fact, in an interview study, some parents said that when they were forced to "unplug" for a few days because of a broken phone or power outage, they enjoyed how clear their head was, how they could go back to single-tasking, and how much easier this made communicating with their young children.

Although research on this topic is still limited, recommendations for all parents include:

- Step back and think about your relationship with your phone. Are you sometimes using it as a stress reliever instead of taking a walk or deep breaths? Are you sometimes purposefully withdrawing into your smartphone from difficult family interactions? Can you tell when your attention has been grabbed by the persuasive design in smartphones, and how much time has gone by from when you just meant to check one quick thing?
- Think about what aspects of your smartphone use stress you out the most (such as checking email or the news). Save these for a

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time when your family is not around (so they don't feed off your stress).

- If you want to create times to unplug and single-task on your family, prioritize mealtimes, bedtimes, and other downtime with your children.
- Remember that children watch and copy their parents, so they are learning how to use smartphones even when parents do not realize it. Avoid behaviors you don't want your kids to have: checking your phone while driving, posting unkind content, or ignoring someone else's calls for your attention while your eyes are on the phone.
- Resist the urge to photograph, document, and post everything—and just be in the moment.

The more we parents demonstrate this type of tech-life balance, the more our children will learn to do the same.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the advantages of putting down your smartphone:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Parents-of-Young-Children-Put-Down-Your-Smartphones.aspx>

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