

SLOW TECH PARENTING GUIDE

Slow Tech Parents...

- Understand that children develop the thinking and social-emotional skills needed for engaging in digital technology very slowly.
- Know that it takes years to model and teach their child these needed skills so that he/she will become an ethical, balanced, creative digital citizen.
- Have different expectations of how each of their children will engage with tech devices, depending on how old each child is and what her developmental needs are.
- Are lovingly firm about their values concerning tech use.
- See screens as tools not just entertainment! Learn the difference between passive consumption of media (TV, DVDs, etc.) and participatory media – especially interactive apps and games. Show their child how to use these technological tools when the need arises just like they teach her to use a hammer or a broom. Think of educational apps like classic board games and activity sets. Find the apps that enhance their children’s learning in the real world (e.g., using an app that turns a tablet into a magnifying glass) and ones that involve creating books, art, and music.
- Know that for their children to develop healthy habits in using screens they gradually let them use them to learn how. (It’s similar to learning how to dress. We don’t wait to teach our children to dress themselves until they can do it completely on their own. We gently guide them to do more and more of it themselves until they can complete the myriad of tasks in dressing independently. The child definitely doesn’t need to be on screens for hours each day but it can’t be zero use either.)
- Are engaged in participatory media with their child. “It’s a great opportunity for what we call ‘joint attention’, or the interactions between a child and a [parent], the back-and-forth, which is critical not just to language development, but brain development.” (Christakis, 2014)
- Say “tell me” instead of “show me”. It’s so easy to quickly pull up a definition, video, etc. Instead they encourage their kids to let a thought or question incubate.
- Know that it’s healthy for all of us to watch an age-appropriate movie just for fun, or to watch one’s favorite sports team play a game, and to listen to age-appropriate music that interests us – all within healthy limits.
- Know that when their child initiates a connection with them they need to respond with full attention. For example, they strictly limit their smartphone use for communication when they are with their child.
- Keep aware of what’s out there in the virtual world – the latest trends, safety issues, etc.

Slow Tech Parents Create Boundaries

- Designate “Device-Free Times” for everyone in the family – mealtimes, bedtimes, family outings and visits to grandparents. For sleep to be restful they shut down all devices one hour before bedtime.
- Ban handheld devices in all bedrooms.
- Have the family computer in the busiest room in the house and place the charging station for all devices in one central location.
- Watch only one device at a time together when they are viewing. All eyes on one screen!
- Create clear boundaries for their children on how to use technology based on age, academic need, and type of devices (see our “Slow Tech Media Diet For Children” and iRules at <http://www.janellburleyhofmann.com>)

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Slow Tech Child's Digital "Media Diet"

0-2 years

Your child needs:

- To explore, learn to trust, and engage in "joint attention" with you.
- No passive screen time – TV, DVDs, tablets, smartphone viewing.
- Her parent(s) to put away computers and tablets when with her.

3-6 years

Your child needs:

- Uninterrupted time engaged in unstructured old-fashioned play (dress up, active outside play, creative, rough and tumble), playing with toys that require a "stick-to-it kind of attention", exploring nature, listening to you read and tell stories.
- Strict limits on her passive screen time of age-appropriate programs – either none or with you co-viewing on Friday night-Saturday night, maximum viewing time = 1 hour total.
- An introduction to how to participate with tech devices in a very limited, positive way by engaging in these activities with your child, such as: Face Time or Skype with grandparents or extended family and child dictates an email to grandparents as she sits next you and the computer and learning and playing with age-appropriate, parent-reviewed apps.

7-9 years

Your child needs:

- Uninterrupted time to play with other children and with open-ended, creative toys, to be actively engaged in real life experiences, to read and be read to, to pursue hobbies, to explore nature.
- Your firm guidance on how to move through boredom without engaging in screen time.
- Limited passive screen time with you co-viewing Friday night-Saturday night, maximum viewing time = 1 hour total.
- Co-participating with media through tech devices with you and independently participating in media for no more than 15-30 minutes a day total, such as: emailing grandparents with you typing for child, co-creating media (videos, music, etc.), co-viewing media that help the child learn how to make something new (like sing a new song), creating media (videos, music, stories, etc.) with parent, using interactive age-appropriate apps, and playing creative, interactive, non-violent video games.

10-12 years

Your child needs:

- Uninterrupted time to play with others with open-ended, creative play materials, to be actively engaged in real life experiences, to read, to pursue hobbies, to explore nature.
- Your firm guidance on how to move through boredom without engaging in screen time.
- Limited passive screen time with you co-viewing Friday night-Saturday night.
- Co-participating with media through tech devices with you and independently participating in media for maximum 30-45 min/day total. See above suggested activities for 6-9 year olds and add the following activities: researching a question child has online with parent, creating media (videos, music, stories, etc.) with parent supervision, beginning to learn how to keyboard and how to program, setting up an email account that you monitor and control the password for, reading e-books, writing family and friends occasional emails.

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13-14 years

Your child needs:

- Time to engage in nature in new, challenging ways (rock climbing, mountain biking, etc.), to pursue hands on interests/hobbies, and to spend time being with friends in active, “real life” experiences.
- Your firm guidance on how to move through boredom without engaging in screen time.
- Limited passive screen time on weekends only.
- Daily opportunities using tech devices so as to become an ethical, responsible user for no more than 1 hour/day, such as above suggestions and the following: researching online for school or for own interests with parent support, completing homework on computer in common area of house, viewing media that helps her learn how to make something new, possibly having own cell phone to communicate with others.
- Clear agreements with you about tech use tailored to her age. It’s more about how she uses technology instead of how much she uses it.
- Create code of conduct with your child. Here is one from Janell Burley Hofmann: “Don’t be mean, don’t lie, don’t embarrass other people, don’t pretend to be someone you’re not, don’t go places you’re not allowed to go. Don’t post pictures that Grandma wouldn’t love.”

Resources:

The Big Disconnect by Catherine Steiner-Adair

Slow Tech Parenting ideas at <http://www.janellburleyhofmann.com>

Christakis, Dimitri A. "Interactive media use at younger than the age of 2 years: time to rethink the American Academy of Pediatrics guideline?" *JAMA pediatrics* 168.5 (2014): 399-400.

Technology and Digital Literacy in the Early Years by Chip Donahue (co-published by NAEYC and Routledge). He has a new anthology on technology and parents/families available late 2016