

SETTING AND KEEPING TECHNOLOGY BOUNDARIES

Technology—it's a blessing and a curse for many parents.

What can provide ten minutes of entertainment for a crying toddler, and the resulting quiet that comes with it, can eventually turn harmful to an iPad-addicted ten-year-old. And, these days, it's not a matter of if your kid will be using technology in school. It's simply a matter of when.

iPads and laptops are everywhere, and for parents who want to put limits on their kids' screen time, it can be difficult to find a healthy balance. So what should a parent do?

1. Make a plan.

School homework is a given. But when it comes to the more "fun" screen time, sit down with your child and set specific guidelines. Be clear and consistent with them—and follow through. Too many times, it's easy to stick to it for a few weeks, then fall back into old habits. Whether it's hours per week, specific times of the day, or even certain rooms where iPads aren't allowed (like bedrooms), make sure your kid knows exactly what's okay and what isn't, when it comes to screen time.

2. Use parental controls.

This is just a basic, practical way to make sure your kid isn't overdoing it. Go into the settings and set limits on what your child can see and for how long they can use the device. This is an easy way to start putting limits on screen time outside of school work.

3. Set an example.

It's hard to enforce screen time rules when you don't have any for yourself. If you're constantly bingeing on Netflix or Hulu in front of the kids, then it's much more difficult to preach about screen time balance. Give yourself certain parameters—like no screen time in bed or after a certain time of day—and then stick to it.

4. Keep screens off the dinner menu.

This one is so important! After long days at school and work, dinner time should be family time—the one part of the day where you can all sit down and engage with each other. Screens not only take away from that opportunity, but they limit your child's ability to use and grow in their social skills.

5. Limit online capabilities for safety.

Screen time is one thing, but screen time with access to online functions within an app is an entirely different thing. You need to be aware of what apps your kid is using and what online features they have. If one particular app is popular with kids, you can be sure that predators will be on there as well—especially if it allows them to interact with kids. Know who your kids are talking to and disable communication features if necessary.

6. Have fun!

It's so easy to get worried, as parents, about the dangers of technology that we forget to have fun with it as well! iPads and the like offer so many exciting features that can benefit our kids in their intellectual and emotional growth. Let's use those to our benefit and enjoy them, while also simply being aware of the negatives that are out there. As long as we're plugged in to what our kids are doing, we can be confident that we're using technology in a positive way.

Like all the generations before us, new forms of technology (radios to TVs to game consoles to iPads) will always present both pros and cons. And just like our parents and their parents, we'll need to navigate through these new forms of entertainment to learn how to best use them with our kids.

These days, schools are using iPads to teach our kids in completely new ways—and that's amazing! As long as we're balancing the way our kids use screens when they get home, there's no reason we can't help them develop a healthy relationship with technology for years to come.