

# 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. It takes years to model and teach a child these needed skills so that she will become an ethical, balanced, creative digital citizen.
- 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.)
- Have different expectations of how each of their children engages with screens, depending on how old each child is and what her developmental needs are and 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.
- 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.

## 6 HEALTHY HABITS FOR A SLOW TECH PARENT

### 1. Model healthy digital media habits.

- Set down your devices when talking to your child. When a child initiates a connection with a parent she needs to respond with full attention.
- Tell her what you are doing when you engage with a screen.
- Eliminate background TV and shut your computer at night.
- Model online etiquette and adhere to social media restrictions for your child.

### 2. Follow a Slow-Tech Media Diet with your child (see attached)

### 3. Do your research

- Decide what your child's media diet will be based on age, academic need, and type of devices. Check out [cyberwise.org](http://cyberwise.org) for a Slow Tech Media Diet, family media planner on [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org) and iRules at <http://www.janellburleyhofmann.com>.
- Find and preview 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. See [commonsensemedia.org](http://commonsensemedia.org) for reviews.
- Find and preview good viewing content by checking reviews, surveying friends.

- Use commonsensemedia.com to make the Internet safer for your child. Block certain sites, filter search results, and use a kid browser w/built in parental controls.
- Keep aware of what's new in the virtual world – the latest trends, safety issues, etc.

#### **4. Play, watch and learn together**

- Engage 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)
- Co-view content and discuss what you're watching and talk about advertising.
- Show your child a book, article, video, etc. that helps her learn about technology.

#### **5. Talk about media and tech with your child**

- 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.
- Talk with your child regularly about what she is doing/viewing on screens.
- Brainstorm with your child how to deal with possible situations of being exposed to content you haven't approved beforehand or with using devices without filters.
- With your middle school child talk about ethical challenges and personal risks of digital media such as cyberbullying, sexting, online advertisements and online predators.

#### **6. Follow your tech-wise family digital media agreements**

Here are some to consider:

- We have "Device-Free Times" – mealtimes, in car, family outings and visits. For sleep to be restful we shut down all devices one hour before bedtime.
- We keep handheld devices out of all bedrooms.
- Our computers are in the busiest room in the house.
- We place the charging station for all devices in one central location.
- We watch only one device at a time.

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### **Media Manners**

- Close your devices when eating alone or with others.
- Do not look at your screen or text while talking with someone.
- Say, “Excuse me” if you must respond to someone urgently when you're with someone and tell them what's going on.

### **Digital Citizenship Guidelines**

- Be polite, kind and respectful.
- Be an up-stander online - stick up for others.

- Tell a parent or trusted adult if you get messages or photos that make you uncomfortable or if others are being bullied, disrespected or treated badly online.
- Understand a website's rules and know how to flag other users for misbehavior.
- Respect the privacy of others. For example, never forward a text or photo w/o asking permission.

## Digital Safety Rules

- Do not befriend, chat or virtually game with someone without your parent's permission.
- Do not share private photos online.
- Do not give your name, school's name, your age, your phone number or your email or home address online.
- Keep passwords private with everyone but your parents.
- Recognize "red flags". Here's one: someone asks you personal questions such as your name and address.
- Do not text/phone while riding a bike, walking or crossing a street.
- Do not send or share anything online that you wouldn't want the entire world to see for eternity.

## Resources

**Websites:** *cyberwise.org, commonsensemedia.com, teensafe.com, healthychildren.org, janellburleyhofmann.com (parent/child contract), theatlantic.com - Articles by Alexandra Samuel, 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.*

### **Books:**

*Screen-Smart Parenting: How to Find Balance and Benefit in Your Child's Use of Social Media, Apps, and Digital Devices* by Jodi Gold

*The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age* by Catherine Steiner-Adair, EdD

*The App Generation: How Today's Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World* by Howard Gardner and Katie Davis

*The Distracted Mind: Ancient Brains in a High-Tech World* by Adam Gazzaley and Larry D. Rosen

*Technology and Digital Literacy in the Early Years* by Chip Donahue (co-published by NAEYC and Routledge)