

Growing Up in the Age of Distraction: Strategies on Replacing Screens and Stress with Human Connection and Success

by Edward Hallowell, M.D.

In this modern age of distraction, many parents and teachers are concerned about the short and long term effects of electronic over-usage combined with academic, family, peer and extra-curricular stress.

Based on his book, *CrazyBusy*, Dr. Ned Hallowell offers these practical strategies to help with the most formidable challenges our children face: how to manage the unprecedented stress today's world imposes on them, how to deal with this world's ubiquitous screens without becoming addicted and how to reestablish the human connection that is all too often missing

1. **Education.** First have a family discussion about the use of electronics and how technology has taken control of their life? Your life? Are they texting their friends while sitting next to them instead of having a face-to-face conversation? Are they spending too much time interacting on Facebook, Instagram or WhatsApp instead of hanging out with friends? Engage them in the discussion. Point out how you grapple with the over use of technology too. To get the best outcome, it is essential that all of the family be involved in managing screen time.

2. **Set a goal of how much total time should be spent each day on electronics.** Then break the total goal into time categories: how much time where, doing what, with whom.

3. **Plan daily periods of abstinence.** These "brain breaks" provide intervals of time in which no electronic device may be turned on. Yes, this will be difficult for your child at first (you too!) So try beginning with 10 minutes twice a day. Then increase that time by 10 minutes a week until you reach 1 hour a day or whatever goal you all want to achieve. To go one step further, plan a **"de-tox" day over the weekend.** Reserve a Saturday or Sunday, during which the family has absolutely no electronic usage whatsoever, except lights and appliances. No TV, no phone, no Internet, no video games, no iPad. Get the family involved in planning the "de-tox" day, i.e., play a board game, go for a hike, visit a relative or family friend, volunteer at a community event or any other ideas the family comes up with as long as they don't involve any electronics. Then have fun reconnecting.

4. **Make it a family goal to restore the healthy habits** that over use of electronics often disrupts: Get more physical exercise, especially outdoors. Eat family dinner together. Get enough sleep. Have some uninterrupted face-to-face conversations; Pray or meditate (yes, kids can do both.)

5. **Encourage your child to replenish daily his/her dose of the other Vitamin C, Vitamin Connect.** Overuse of electronics depletes one's store of the human connection. Spend time having a face-to-face conversation with them, uninterrupted by anything. Try banning electronics during dinner. Whether it's with you, a friend or teacher, having a **face-to-face conversations with others** is an important step.

6. **Monitor progress together.** Set time aside each day or weekly to see how everyone is doing. What difficulties are they having? What difficulties are you having? How does everyone feel about this?

Conclusion.

As a parent, how you approach managing the use of electronics yourself will also set the tone for how your child manages his or her screen time. It's not just a problem for children; adults overuse electronics as well. Setting goals to limit use of electronics and helping each other achieve those goals can be a family project. It won't be easy, but don't give up. Your success in addressing the overuse of electronics one strategy at a time will lead to your child's success, and a lot more joy for the entire family.

Adapted from *CrazyBusy Overstretched, Overbooked and About to Snap!* Ballentine, NY, 2006.

For more information go to: www.drhallowell.com