



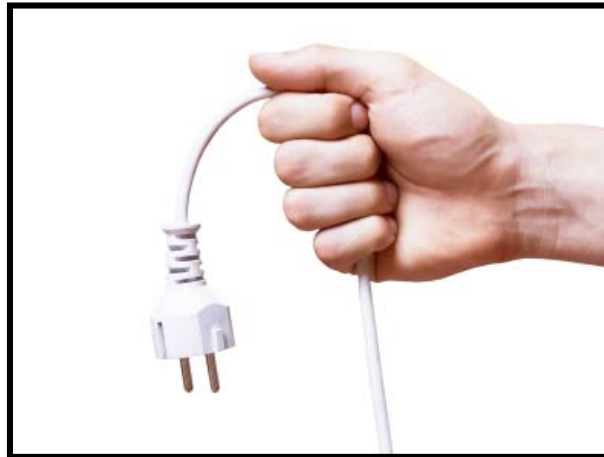
Parenting

YOUR PARTNERS IN PARENTING

Take Time to “Unplug”

Technology, technology, technology. It seems like it is everywhere. We can't do anything these days with a screen, phone, or text message following us. According to a 2005 survey, most Americans—including children—spend at least nine hours a day watching TV, surfing the web, or talking on their cell phones. Of those hours, one-third of the time is spent using two or more of those media at once. In this edition of Positive Parenting, we are looking at technology from a few different angles. Technology can be an especially powerful tool for keeping in touch with those you love. As mentioned in the next article, an example of this may be a non-custodial parent, or parents working through shared custody using technology to stay in touch with their child. Social Media can keep you up to date and connected.

Then, in the final article, the American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) reinforces their recommendation that children under 2 not have any “screen time”. This includes parents watching TV while the child is in the room. Studies found that when the TV was on, parents



interacted with their children less.

All of this points to a greater question in family dynamics—are these new technologies good or bad? I think the answer lays in the mixed messages of the articles—BOTH. These tools can be helpful for keeping in touch, learning more about parenting, connecting with other parents, connecting to extended family, and increased learning through educational websites and online programs. However, they can also serve as a great distraction and a constant ‘need’ to be in touch.

In her recent book, *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle talks about a study that she did with parents and children regarding their opinions of technology.

She thought she would find many parents that were annoyed that their children are always on their phone or computer. What she found was the reverse. Many children spoke of how their parents are addicted to their smart phone. They spoke of a desire for their parents to put down their phones and interact and pay more attention to them. She

suggests that when using technology parents should be intentional about their communication rather than using it as a time filler. She suggests that it is important to have a conscious relationship with your phone, using it intentionally when needed but also turning it off and putting it away when not needed. If you are not intentional parents may find that rather than a tool for connecting, phones can be a tool for alienation. If you find yourself spending more time interacting with your smart phone than your child or partner, perhaps it's time to think about “unplugging”.

“Unplugging” can look different for different families. Some families choose to make one day a week a “Shabbat” or day

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Technology and Divorced Families

Although some marriage problems have been blamed on social networking sites, some of these technology tools can actually help with divorced families. With modern technology, parents can talk to their children without interference from the other parent, as well as keep in better contact with their children. “Parental alienation” (one of the parents typically restricts the child’s contact with the other parent out of resentment, bitterness or to “get back” at the other parent) can be reduced with the technology we have today.

Before cell phones, parents would have to go through their former spouse when they contacted their child. But now many parents give their children pre-paid cell phones to insure contact. Other parents have contracts which ensure they can keep in contact with their children through email.

Online calendars are great for

sharing schedules and special occasions. Each family has access to this calendar and appointments, activities, etc., can be color-coded for each child. Events can be updated easily.

In addition, because kids are so tech savvy these days, they are teaching their parents to keep in contact with them using Facebook and Skype. These vehicles can allow more privacy, especially if one parent is prone to eavesdropping on phone conversations. Email can also help parents communicate without their kids overhearing unpleasant dialogue. Messages can be kept simple and to the point when parents talk about picking up and delivering children, thus avoiding fighting and outbursts in front of the children.

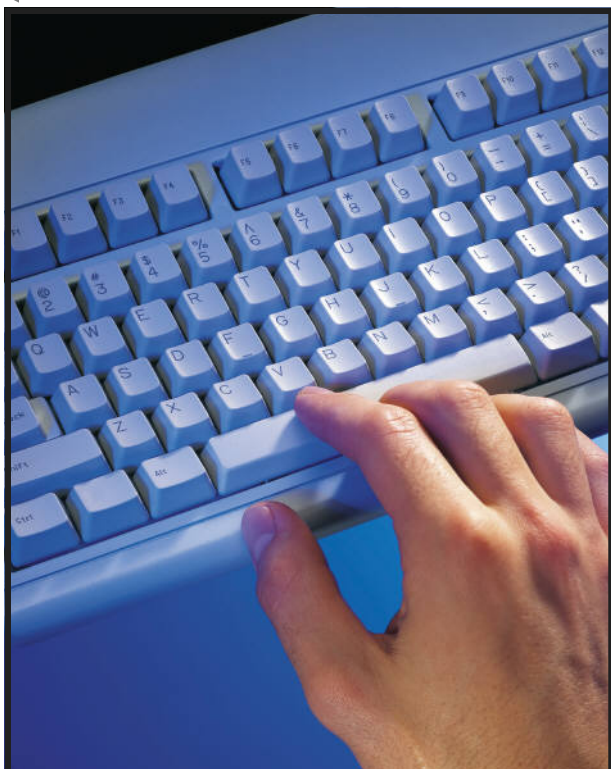
Videoconferencing can also help parents keep in contact with their children, especially if they don’t live close to each other.



Videoconferencing can allow parents to help with homework, celebrate birthdays and even read bedtime stories. Keeping in closer touch allows parents to keep strong bonds with their children. Children benefit from having a relationship with both their parents. They do better in school, have fewer behavior problems and get along better with their peers than children in sole custody arrangements.

Sending pictures by text messages or posting pictures on facebook can also help the non-custodial parents keep in touch when they can’t attend all of the children’s events. These pictures can later be





with bedtime and be consistent.

- When the other parent is on vacation with the children, this is their time. Don't call all the time, and try to call at times that won't interfere with special daytime activities that can occur while on vacation.

- Some parents don't allow a child to have a phone or a computer. If

the other parent wants to buy one when the child is at their home, those costs are handled by that parent.

- Don't pump your children about conversations with

their other parent. As difficult as it may be for you, your children deserve privacy and should feel comfortable when talking with both parents.

- Focus on the needs of your children and not on hating your former spouse. If technology can help your children feel closer to their other parent, help them know it is ok to love both of you.

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saved and put into albums for parents to enjoy at a later date.

Even though technology has made it easier to keep in touch, it can be painful for parents to see their children living lives without them, especially when spouses remarry or when a former spouse turns out to be a better parent than you ever thought they could be.

If you decide that technology will work for your family, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- If you plan to speak to your children in the evening, work with the other parent to set up times that won't interfere



Babies and Toddlers Should Learn from Play, Not Screens

As a parent of a small child, I know how tempting it is to set your child down in front of the television to get some things done around the house, like cleaning or cooking...or just a minute of sanity. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has recently reinforced its recommendations that children under the age of 2 receive NO screen time. In a world where there are screens everywhere— at home, at the grocery store, at restaurants, this can be challenging for parents.

There are many television programs and DVDs that claim to have educational benefits for children. So when investigating further into the effect of media on children, scientists researched the potential benefits that media could have. One of their findings, however, showed that media programs are only beneficial or educational if children are able to understand the content and follow a story line. However, children under the age of 2 generally do not have this ability.



Further Key Findings:

- Unstructured play time is more valuable for the developing brain than electronic media. Children learn to think creatively, problem solve, and develop reasoning and motor skills at early ages through unstructured, unplugged play. Free play also teaches them how to entertain themselves.
- Young children learn best from—and need— interaction with humans, not screens.
- Parents who watch TV or videos with their child may add to the child’s understanding, but

children learn more from live presentations than from televised ones.

- When parents are watching their own programs, this is “background media” for their children. It distracts the parent and decreases parent-child interaction. Its presence may also interfere with a young child’s learning from play and activities.
- Television viewing around bedtime can cause poor sleep habits and irregular sleep schedules, which can adversely affect mood, behavior and learning.
- Young children with heavy media use are at risk for delays in language development once they start school, but more research is needed as to the reasons.

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Take Time to Unplug (con't)

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of rest from all technologies. During this time, parents and kids agree not to use their cell phone, check messages or e-mails. Other families may choose to have limits on technology- such as a time limit. Perhaps setting a timer would be helpful to know how long you have been watching TV or on the internet. Once you reach a certain time, you agree to turn it off. Other families may choose to have limits on certain spaces or times- a "sacred space". Examples of these unplugged family times may be the dinner table, family discussions, or family outings. Whatever you choose for your family, there is much to be gained from

unplugging from machines and plugging back into the humans in your family.

Here are a few ways you might consider "unplugging":

- Go for a family walk and leave all cell phones and smart phones at the house.
- Play a board game together, no technology allowed
- Play a game of catch or basketball outside together.
- Rake leaves or do yard work together.
- Turn meal time into family time. Engage the whole family into making dinner together and sitting down and having conversations. Turn off all TVs and phones.
- Have family reading time.

Read a book to your kids, or choose a chapter book to go through together as a family.

Maybe you need to start small, with just one hour or so of media-free time, or perhaps you are ready to jump in with both feet for a media free weekend. However you start, just take the time to do it. Plugging back into real communication and connection will always be worth the missed texts!

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