



2022

Devices: Tools or Vices?

Rebekah Case

Brigham Young University, rebekahcase99@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/familyperspectives>



Part of the [Life Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Case, Rebekah (2022) "Devices: Tools or Vices?," *Family Perspectives*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 5.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/familyperspectives/vol4/iss1/5>

This Featured Insight is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Family Perspectives by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Devices: Tools or Vices?

by Rebekah Case

My grandpa cut the power cord, and my mom hid the TV remote. I guess a belief that screen entertainment is inherently bad runs in my family. As a child and adolescent, I frequently “snuck” TV in when my mom wasn’t home or before she woke up. Into adulthood, however, I also felt that watching movies, no matter the scenario, was a waste of productive time. Though this belief was incomplete, it was not without basis.

Media in the home can be a vice or a tool for increasing family togetherness.

Research has shown that obsessive media use decreases academic performance,¹ weakens interpersonal skills,² and isolates children from reality.³ However, a substantive body of

research also suggests that family media use might actually support and improve familial relationships. Media in the home can be a vice that disrupts family time, but with the right

application and mindset, devices can be a tool for increasing family cohesion and togetherness.

Jordan Shapiro, senior fellow at the Sesame Workshop, shared his personal experience of how video games brought his family

closer together.⁴ After divorce and custody battles, Jordan struggled to connect with his young sons. He reflects, “I thought [video games] were a time-suck, something that less productive

people did when they could be reading or writing. But I wanted to spend time with my boys and help them through this difficult patch, and they wanted to play video games.” Jordan learned that video games can encourage imaginative play, provide analogies for real world problems, and bridge the parent-child communication gap.

An issue arises, however, when video games, television, and other screen activities interfere with parent-child interactions.

In order to create a healthy atmosphere that promotes familial relationships through media, parents might consider the following suggestions:

Set clear no-screen times and zones.

Screens can serve as a virtual babysitter in waiting rooms or on airplane rides, but watching YouTube videos at a restaurant while the parents talk might inhibit the development of essential

social skills.⁵ The electronic nanny may entertain kids in silence, but it offers little emotional support.

After a hard day, kids must be given the chance to digest their positive and negative experiences. When they are placed in front of the TV, their emotions may be bottled up. Children might become conditioned to “veg out” when they

are stressed or upset instead of learning healthy emotion regulation. Thus, defining boundaries for when media use is appropriate and when it is excessive is most helpful.

Parents can help their children understand when and where technology is appropriate. This might mean no TV before school or no devices at the dinner table. Parents might decide devices cannot be used in bedrooms and must be charged in the kitchen. Establishing clear boundaries in early childhood will set the framework for healthy media use in adolescence.

Establishing clear boundaries early will set the framework for healthy media use in adolescence.

Be consistent in rule enforcement. Maintain balance.

Children respond best to rules when they know what to expect. When it comes to rules regarding media in the home, try to be consistent. If you tell your children that they cannot watch TV on weeknights, but you fail to enforce that rule when you are busy or need some alone time, your children may try to resist and negotiate.

Make media time family time.

Family media time can help families gather together rather than separate. Watching media together can also provide an opportunity for physical affection and cuddles. Additionally, watching prosocial media with your children can provide opportunities for teaching and discussion on difficult social topics and how to act in unfamiliar situations. Parents will also know what the media is teaching their children—a win-win scenario.

The best way to teach children media skills is to provide examples for them.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), an association of medical professionals dedicated to the health and development of youth, provides suggestions for how to wisely use technology in the home.⁶ The AAP advises, “When using digital media, caregivers should consider what it is displacing.” If videogames, iPad apps, and Netflix are stealing one-on-one parent-child interaction or creative play with siblings, the opportunity cost might exceed the dividends. However, if media is utilized to foster familial interaction and kept in balance with other activities, the video games that promote creativity are less likely to short-change children of the essential social development they might get in the sandbox.

Model wise technology use for children.

The best way to teach children media skills is to provide examples for them. Parents can be

intentional with media use by putting down their phone when a child is speaking to them or following family technology rules.

Complete abstinence from media—like my grandpa and mom preferred—is certainly becoming less plausible in 21st century parent-

ing. Because children will inevitably engage with media, they must learn how to use media devices as tools rather than vices. Parents would do well to note that screens are not *all* bad, and with proactive engagement, media can promote family togetherness.

Endnotes

1. Mundy, L. K., Canterford, L., Hoq, M., Olds, T., Moreno-Betancur, M., Sawyer, S., Kosola, S., & Patton, G. C. (2020). Electronic media use and academic performance in late childhood: A longitudinal study. *PLOS ONE*, 15(9). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0237908>
2. Lyons, L. (2021, April 20). Social media addiction in families: What is the impact? *Addiction Hope*. <https://www.addictionhope.com/blog/social-media-addiction-families/>.
3. Taylor, J. (2013, March 13). Is technology creating a family divide? *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-prime/201303/is-technology-creating-family-divide>.
4. Shapiro, J. (2019, February 22). Screen time can also be family time. Here's how to do it. *ideas.ted.com*. <https://ideas.ted.com/screen-time-can-also-be-family-time-heres-how-to-do-it/>.
5. Clifton, W. (2015, August 11). The electronic nanny. *People Unplugged*. <https://peopleunplugged.org/2015/08-11-the-electronic-nanny/>.
6. American Academy of Pediatrics. (n.d.). Growing up digital: Media research symposium. https://www.aap.org/en-us/documents/digital_media_symposium_proceedings.pdf