screen-smart

by Jodi Gold, MD

General Recommendations for Tech Time

- Don't give exact times for children under eight years. (They don't have an adult's sense of time.)
- You can use TV episodes as a timer for young kids, for example, one short show (fifteen minutes) or two long shows (sixty minutes.)
- Use pictures and cartoons for schedules with younger children.
- Err on the side of play, but there are lots of educational technology opportunities for younger children.

- Required activities, chores, and homework should be done prior to technology use.
- From Sunday to Thursday, I recommend a thirty- to ninety-minute technology-free homework period. This is time for homework that does not need to be done on the computer or tablet. If computers are required, then make it a phone-free time.
- Instead of fighting over duration of play, give clear departure times and bedtimes. For instance, technology turned off at 9:30 PM for sleep and 7:30 AM for school.
- Be wary of kids rushing through work to get online. If that happens, have an adult review homework before giving back the phone or letting the child go online.
- Distraction is the best way to build a life for your child that is not media heavy. Children report watching TV and going online when they are bored. You can't entertain your children all the time, but if they have after-school programs and playdates, then they may have less reason and less time to end up on technology.

- Take the tech-free challenge and find thirty minutes each day where the entire family unplugs. Perhaps your family can't find that thirty minutes daily; then try for a few times per week. The tech-free challenge sends a powerful message that the entire family is trying to find time to unplug together.
- If your child has had a full technology-free day, there may be nothing wrong with relaxing with TV or a game in the evening.
- If you are concerned about a tween or teenager's Internet use at night, then turn off the Internet at your home at a certain time in the evening.
- Remember that children and teenagers should unplug thirty minutes prior to bedtime.

My Recommendations for Managing Technology and ADHD

- Establish clear time limits for game and Internet use.
- Use a big timer that is not embedded in a phone or computer.
- Start giving warnings fifteen minutes prior to shutdown.
- Give reminders every five minutes prior to shutdown.
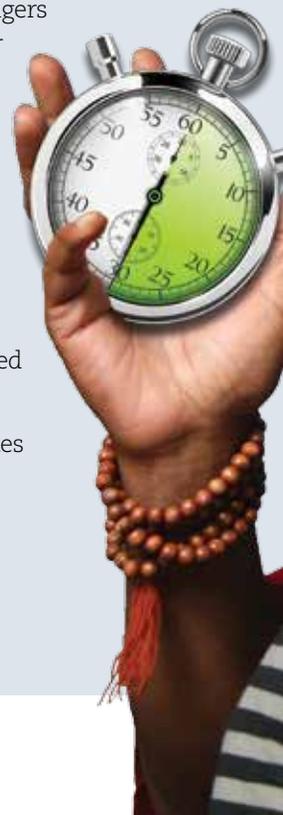
parenting tips

- Help with the transition by clarifying the next activity.

- Provide encouragement when your child is able to unplug successfully.

- Recognize that shifting attention and tasks is a learned skill.

My Recommendations for Video Games if Your Child Has Symptoms of ADHD

- Do not allow MA-related games.

- Add two years to manufacturer recommendations.

- Understand what types of games your child plays.

- Observe your child's behavior after he turns off the computer or game.

- Discourage evening play if gaming leads to more agitated behavior.

- Reward kids for successfully unplugging or shifting tasks.

My Recommendations for Managing Problematic Use of Digital Technology

- Talk to your kids and teenagers about hyperfocusing.

- Help them recognize that they have trouble unplugging.

- Help kids and teenagers set reasonable time limits and use timers.

- Use lots of gentle reminders to prepare them for unplugging. Encourage healthy use.

- Take breaks when use becomes unhealthy. ◑

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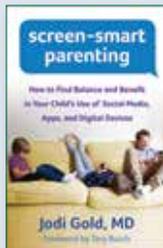
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