The best solution for excessive screen use is to get kids engaged in character-building activities that are screen-less. -Dr. Laura Kastner

Laura Kastner, PhD is a clinical psychologist and a clinical professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of Washington. Dr. Kastner expertly clarifies the challenges children and teens experience that come with growing up in a 24/7 connected environment. Dr. Kastner has co-authored five books covering all stages of child development and addressing the strategic parenting required at each stage in today's technology-dominant world. She has received the Distinguished Psychologist Award from Washington State Psychological Association and been named one of Seattle's Top Doctors.

Dr. Kastner began by pointing out that every five years there is a new parenting issue 'du jour'. The similarity in these issues is that they are always focused on what worries us. As human beings, we have a natural proclivity to move towards scary things - a 'negative adaptivity bias'. From the dawn of human history, our very survival depended on our skill at dodging danger. The brain developed systems that would make it unavoidable for us not to notice danger and thus, hopefully, respond to it. Kastner encourages parents to fight against our evolutionary tendencies and save our energy for the things that they should REALLY worry about.

For instance, Kastner recommends brushing up on our understanding of child development and working to understand our child's unique temperament. Babies come out of the womb with certain temperaments. There are nine temperament traits (Sensitivity; Distractibility; Activity Level; Intensity of Reaction; Rhythmicity; Adaptability; Mood; Approach/Withdrawal and Persistence) which are usually measured on a continuum. Understanding where you (as a parent) fall and where your child falls on this continuum can help you adjust to make the "fit" good and provide the best possible familial experience for your child - from childhood through adolescence.

Kastner also stresses the importance of adopting an authoritative parenting approach. This parenting style is about setting limits, reasoning with kids, and being responsive to their emotional needs. Kids raised by authoritative parents are more likely to become independent, self-reliant, socially accepted, academically successful, and well-behaved. They are less likely to report depression and anxiety, and less likely to engage in antisocial behavior like delinquency and drug use.

During adolescent development, the typical teenager exhibits more rule breaking, moodiness and 'entitle-mania' (Kastner's term for ungratefulness) than during any other period in their development. Most of these behaviors are due to changes in the brain. Between ages 13 and 25, 40-50% of the 'thinking' parts of the teenager's brain is 'pruned' away. According to Kastner, "The brain begins looking like the jungle of Borneo and then, by age 25, looks like a perfectly-

trimmed bonsai". The resulting brain is beautiful, however, the pruning process is ugly. During this pruning period, you, as the parent, are acting as the teen's ancillary pre-frontal cortex - the decision-making part of their brain. This pruning process serves an evolutionary purpose. The teen is individuating from their parents and learning how to eventually become self-sufficient. Kastner stresses that this individuation process, or bonsai-trimming, requires learning, experiences, mistakes and failures. Teens learn from experience, NOT from overprotectiveness.

Moreover, parents need to recognize that a modicum of stress is actually a good thing. If optimum performance happens at the top of the bell curve, kids need a little boost, or increase in stress, to get up there. However, the performance curve moves from boredom on the far left to burn-out on the far right. Parents need to teach their teens how to stay away from the two extremes. When kids suffer from burn out - also known as toxic stress - they train their bodies to believe that it is an emergency all the time. This 'stress response' is maladaptive and oftentimes causes kids to adopt poor coping strategies such as media addiction. Overstressed kids claim that they use their phones to literally 'calm down' their brains.

Kastner encourages adaptive/healthy coping instead. She stresses the importance of exercise, hobbies, positive civic engagement and spending time in nature. She also encourages parents to look at the sleep and nutritional habits of their teens. Last, she stresses that parents move toward wise-mindedness - or "balancing both sides of your mental equation: rational thought and emotion." Wise-Minded Parenting is the art of staying positive in negative situations and WISE becomes an acronym for tough moments with teens:

- **W: Wait**: When your kid comes at you with a negative comment or a defiant stance, resist the urge to react immediately. Get quiet and observe your child objectively. "Wow. She's mad and she's saying she is going to the party, even though I just said no."
- **I: Investigate**: Get in touch with and calm your own emotions before you deal with hers. "Wow. My heart is racing. My stomach hurts. I am really mad. Deep breath."
- **S: Say validating things**: "You are feeling frustrated because you can't go to a party at an unsupervised house. You think I am unreasonable. You feel like your life is too restrictive." All we have to do here is make the child feel heard and (as hard as this is) ignore the attitude she is bringing to the situation.
- **E: Evaluate**: What is the most realistic goal in this moment? It might only be not to make this fight worse. It probably isn't realistic to expect that she understands your point of view or sees the logic in your answer. At this point, you end the conversation on a positive note, "I'm sorry you are so upset but that's our house rule." And leave the situation.

Kastner ends her talk with a reminder for parents: the healthier you are, the healthier your children will be.

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Parenting is parenting - online <u>and</u> off. -Dr. Yalda Urls

Yalda Uhls, PhD helps concerned parents separate hype from reality in guiding kids through childhood in an online 21st century. Dr. Uhls, the author of *Media Moms & Digital Dads*, and a consultant to Common Sense Media, spent 15 years as a content developer and film executive at studios including MGM and Sony before earning a doctorate in psychology from UCLA where she researched the impact of media on children. She brings her dual knowledge of entertainment media and academic research to her understanding of the current digital environment to help parents navigate safe and healthy child-rearing in a networked world.

Uhls begins with a question: 'What new media', she asks, 'most concerned parents in the 1800s?' The answer: Books.

Her anecdote stresses that every generation reacts adversely to new media - in the 1920's it was radio; in the 1950's it was TV, in the 1970's computers, and now it is digital devices and social media. However, some concern may be warranted. Between schoolwork and their social lives, kids spend more time with digital devices and media than any other activity in their lives. Over the course of a year, kids spend 14,000 hours in school and 35,000 hours on media. The use of digital media increases to about 6 hours/day between 8 and 12 years of age due, in part, to schools introducing tablets as young as 3rd grade.

Uhls states that though the research is newer on parental mediation of media, it is showing what Kastner stressed: the best way to parent in the digital age is with an active and authoritative approach.

Urls also stresses positivity in media parenting. When approaching the topic of media usage with your kids, work to be warm and positive. She encourages parents to switch the paradigm and try to say three positive things about media for every one negative thing. Limits and boundaries are still important, however, one of the riskiest ways to control online behavior is to be completely strict. Focus on WHAT your kids are doing on media - are they using it to create, communicate, or learn? Or ask if they feel so over-scheduled that they need to 'hang out' and 'chill out' online with their friends. Use positive consequences such as: 'if you get off your computer every night this week by 9pm, you can stay on one hour later next week'.

Parents, too, are not immune to the affects of media. The average adult spends 9 hours/day on media. Uhls cites a study in which 6,000 people were surveyed to examine the relationship between parents, children and smartphones - 54% of children reported that they felt parents checked their devices too often; and 32% of kids reported feeling 'unimportant' when parents get distracted by phones. Parents must model the behavior they want to see in their own kids, especially when children are young and they want whatever is taking your attention from them. Urls suggests introducing a Family Media Agreements/Device Contract, such as found at the

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Common Sense Media site.   https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/technology-addiction-concern-controversy-and-finding-balance/resources   The point of these Agreements is that EVERYBODY puts down their devices. Try to build device-free time into every day. Start with 10 minutes and build up from there.

Uhls recommends the 6 C's when it comes to parenting and media:
1. **Content matters** - Pay attention to the content of your children's games/apps/sites;
2. **Curate and Check ratings** - Help/teach your child how to check the ratings on their apps by themselves, as ultimately THEY should be making the decisions as to appropriateness on their own. Introducing your children to Common Sense Media is a good start.
3. **Co-View the Content** - As it is basically impossible to watch all that your children are watching, expect them to report back to you about the content. Use your family values to explain why you don't approve of certain themes/ideas/subject matter.
4. **Converse** - Talk *with - not at* - your kids about their media.
5. **Critical Thinking** - Teach your kids to think critically about the messages in the content and about how they are interacting in the game play. For instance, ask, 'Why are the women in this video game wearing bikinis while the guys are in jeans & sweatshirts?'
6. **Lean on COPPA** - Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule ("COPPA") imposes certain requirements on operators of websites or online services directed to children under 13 years of age, and on operators of other websites or online services that have actual knowledge that they are collecting personal information online from a child under 13 years of age.

Do not spend too much time worrying about the kinds of social media your kids use (Snapchat vs. Twitter vs. Instagram) - think about the features of the social media. Get involved in your child's media life, especially during the tween years. Kids have to learn how to socialize online. As their parents, you have a lot to teach them. Look at a text with your child and ask questions such as: 'What is the tone of these words?'; 'Is that appropriate language to be using?'; and 'Could this photo be interpreted incorrectly?' Remind kids of screenshot risks - over and over again.

Urls reassures parents with the question: What percentage of teens say social media is their favorite media activity??
- 10% - RiGHT ANSWER
- 20%
- 50%
- 75%

Kids prefer to communicate face to face: 80% of kids report using media simply to hang out and be with their friends. A quote from a teen sums up their feelings: *"Adults don't get it - they think I'm addicted to technology - but I'm not addicted to technology, I'm addicted to my friends"*.