

Technology takeover

The interference of technology on family life.

Being both a 'Technology Coach' and a parent to two girls under the age of 7 has definitely brought its own challenges. I started 'Tech Coach HQ' last year and my background is in education and has been since 2003 in both primary and secondary music education.

Having the perspective of both a parent, educator and technology expert has given me perspective on different sides of the 'tech' with kids debate. I am not saying it is easy and there are more things to contend with in 2014 than I dealt with growing up in the 80's.

Steve Jobs, his kids and screen time

I heard once in a keynote that Steve Jobs and a few other leading technologists limit their screen time (even though you would think this be the opposite case). I have

noticed especially this year the 'retro' trend of living a more 'simple' life with more families choosing to have 'Tech Free' Sundays or weekends or even removing 'tech' altogether to focus on 'play' and spending more quality time as a family unit.

What research is showing:

Technology just like with anything else can be addictive. Boundaries are very important at a young age and this needs to be consistent (not saying that the occasional time isn't bad, just not to sit in front of the iPad, computer screen or TV all the time).

With a recent study by the American Academy of Pediatrics suggesting 'screen free' zones in the house and limiting screen time for one to two hours per day (this includes television, computers and mobile devices) over the age of two. Under the age of two, it is recommended to have no screen time.



Iemma Family rules

For me personally, screen time has always been educational (and yes Play School and ABC2 were are still something that I let my kids watch). I do have a rule on a weekend that television is not allowed to come on until 4pm and even then it is only till 5.30 which is roughly when dinner coincides. If my daughters use the iPad, then television time becomes limited.

Television in our family home goes off after dinner and often we read to our girls and play board games before bedtime.

Challenges of 'Screen Time'

There are always going to be challenges with 'screen time' especially if your child is at school and they are also using devices. It is up for individual parents to decide what is a good balance for their family.

Written by Megan Iemma, Mum of two and owner of Tech Coach HQ which solves and educates businesses about using technology. Learn more on the website www.techcoachhq.com.au

What are relevant boundaries for children?

Here are my five boundaries for children/teenages:

1. Work out a time limit based on the age of the child.
2. If it is a school night (and there is homework to be done) try and get that done first and then have 'screen time'.
3. No 'tech' at meals (unless it is needed for specific communication such as a child with communication needs)
4. Tech needs to be visible at all times (i.e. keep in family areas if possible)
Set timers/passwords where applicable

What are relevant boundaries for the family unit?

1. Again, keep 'Tech' away from meal tables (unless essential for communication)
2. Be present. It's hard to have a conversation while you are on Facebook checking your updates and trying to listen to your kids after school.
3. Model consistency using technology. If your kids see you set boundaries for when you use technology, it will be easier for them to follow the boundaries you set for them.
4. Limit tech when you are out for family outings (unless you need to for specific purposes). I used to take the iPod touch out when we went for dinner and about a year ago, I stopped this practice as my two girls then were expecting the iDevices if we went **anywhere!** Yes, they did have to go 'cold turkey' for a while but they don't ask anymore for a device to magically appear out my handbag.
Have a chart if needed to explain when 'screen time' is allowed in your family.