



PARENT SENSE VICKI CURRAN, EdS, MA, LPC, NCC

Here we go again?

Here we go again!? by Vicki Curran, EdS, MA, LPC, NCC

With summer here, it's important for families to have a "game plan" regarding electronics use. (And so, yet again, here's another article discussing the use of electronics). This plan should include how much time is appropriate and what needs to happen before turning on any type of screen.

One of the best ways to balance electronic usage over summer vacation is to make sure there are alternatives. Boredom gets kids stuck in the routine of staring at the television or plugging into a video game. Helping kids to get together with friends or be involved in activities outside the home helps avoid the temptation of screen time.

Of course, it's not always possible to schedule activities. There are (and should be) unstructured times. Overscheduling kids has its own issues. For unstructured times, require some type of "checklist" before

devices are turned on. Encourage kids to:

1. Eat breakfast, get dressed and brush teeth (if they haven't already done this).
2. Read for at least 20 minutes.
3. Check their room to be sure it is clean (bed is made, clothes are off the floor and things are straightened up).
4. Play, build or get involved in something creative for at least 40 minutes.
5. Finish one chore that needs to get done (and complete it well enough that an adult would consider it a job well done).

Once they've completed these tasks (or any others you may add), they can plug in and zone out! But limit the amount of time they are allowed to stay connected to their devices. Set a timer to alert everyone when that time is up. Then have them find something else to do that doesn't involve a screen. Depending on your family's preferences, their allotted time for electronic devices can be a once a day event or they can earn more time later in the day by go-

ing through their checklist again.

Most importantly, make interacting with others in person a requirement. Online friends or online play does not count. Face to face interaction is a must for our children. According to Psychology Today, "It's much easier to injure friendships online than in person because of the ease of creating misunderstandings electronically." Also, while online friendships can expand our children's worldview and social network, they can also be extremely risky. Make sure you thoroughly screen the friends your children are making online. (And if your teen plans to meet an online friend in person, plan the outing in a public place with yourself or another trusted adult in attendance).

Finally, set a cut-off time at night for your children to unplug and turn off their screens. A good rule to have (no matter how old they are) is if you're not awake to monitor interactions, they shouldn't be online. Having them get into the habit of

charging their devices overnight in your room is a great way to teach them healthy habits into adulthood.

Our children are always watching. If we're asking them to spend more time tuned into real-life personal interactions, we should be modeling that ourselves. Parents need to unplug and avoid checking emails or being on social media (especially on vacation). Turn phone notifications off and be in the moment with your family!

The Internet is a useful tool, from discovering and researching vacation destinations to keeping in contact with close friends and family. Setting summer internet usage guidelines will help make the most of the summer break, keep everyone safe, and (most importantly) promote meaningful time spent together.

For more information or a list of local licensed professionals, contact Coastal Community Counseling Resources at 732-612-3148.