

PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH - PARENTS AND SCREEN TIME

I was home with my children after school one day. They were eating a snack and I was thinking about all the little “to-dos” that are part of running a household. I was texting their father about what to have for dinner when my nine year old came to me with a request “just a minute, darling” I said. Two minutes later I was emailing someone about one of the to-dos when my six year old came to me with a request – “just a minute, honey” I said. I finished the email opened up one of my favourite social networking sites, when I heard a loud “Mom!” It was then I remembered my children’s unmet requests.

The research is pretty clear that when children spend too much time looking at electronic screens (TV, tablets, smart phones, gaming devices etc.) it can interfere with their development. Many parents know this and put limits on the amount of time their children spend looking at screens. But what about the amount of time us parents spend looking at screens – does that affect our kids?

Digital information (emailing, texting and social networking) has become such a part of our daily lives that it is easy to lose track of how often it captures our attention and how much of the “here and now” we are missing. Babies and children live in the here and now. Babies are born ready to learn and they need their parents to input the data (with spoken words, songs, games, ideas, etc.). Children learn through real life and the discussions about real life they have with parents and caregivers.

Talking and interacting with children is an essential part of helping them develop speech and language skills. This doesn’t mean parents have to play and interact with their children all day long. It’s okay for children to play by themselves some of the time. However, it is critical that children have some time every day really connecting with a parent. Relationships are built and grow when we respond to each other.

I’ve decided I want to keep my own screen time to moments that I have planned to use it and not because my mind took me there by habit. So, tomorrow after school I am going to sit with my kids at the table as they eat their snack and leave my computer and phone in another room. After that, I will take some time to check my email and get the to-dos done. Then the kids and I are going to the park and I’m leaving my phone at home.