

Balanced Living – August 2021

The Impact of Technology on Children

Parenting children of today's generation comes with a unique set of challenges due to the many recent advancements in technology. There is no denying the reach technology has in our lives, as well as the lives of our children.

Technology is virtually in every home in one way or another: about 96% of Americans have a TV and 94% of children ages 3 to 18 have internet access either through a computer or smartphone. According to a national survey done by Common Sense Media in 2019, 53% of children have a smartphone by the time they turn 11. Therefore, it's important for parents to be mindful of how their children use technology and the potential effects—both positive and negative.



Negative Impacts

Technology can negatively affect children's developing social skills, relationships, health, and overall ability to focus.

- **Social skills:** With the increased use of technology, children might not be adequately developing their social skills. This can lead to more children being socially awkward, withdrawn, shy, or intimidated by social situations. They might not know how to engage with other children or adults. Developing social skills takes practice, and if technology is often in the way, there are fewer opportunities for kids to develop these skills.
- **Relationships:** Children might get used to being alone and lose the desire to engage with their parents or even friends, outside of the internet. Often the virtual reality of their devices is more appealing and entertaining than the physical reality.
- **Health problems:** Technology can potentially influence the child's developing brain and problem-solving skills. For instance, the child might be reliant on a device to solve problems for them rather than using brain connections to work through a problem and find a solution. There could also be a lack of exercise

due to being inside, which can cause weight gain. If kids use their devices before bedtime, this could lead to reduced sleep quality, affecting their overall wellbeing and immune system.

- **Ability to focus:** Children who spend a lot of time using devices might have a reduced attention span and ability to focus due to their reliance on technology to pay attention for them. This is evident in classrooms, where teachers are opting for shorter lesson plans to accommodate students becoming easily distracted.
- **Dangers of browsing:** With so much information available on the internet, it's difficult for parents to monitor what their children are exposed to, including inappropriate content or interactions with strangers.

Positive Impacts

There are also many ways in which technology can positively impact our lives and those of our children—it all depends on how the technology is being used.

- **Organization:** Technology can be beneficial to organization and planning. For example, families can keep an online calendar to make it easier to stay updated on each other's schedules. Group text messaging is also convenient for streamlining communication and keeping everyone in the loop. Lastly, technology also makes budgeting easier with different apps, which can help parents teach children about money management.
- **Research and critical thinking:** The internet provides access to a great deal of information and resources to help children learn about different topics. This is helpful for school projects or for researching areas of interest. This can also be a teachable moment, by showing children how to sift through information to find reliable sources.
- **Bonding and community:** Technology can foster connection by allowing kids to stay in touch with family members or friends who do not live close by. Also, kids can interact with others in their age group while playing games online and learn to play as a team.
- **Self-expression:** Children can learn how to share their thoughts online, which is a powerful tool that can build confidence. They can learn how to connect with others and be exposed to other viewpoints or perspectives.
- **Creativity and exploring interests:** In many ways, technology fosters creativity and learning new skills through various apps for all different ages. Children can explore different areas they have an interest in, such as learning to play an instrument, creative writing, or beginner programs related to various subjects.

Coping with a Tragedy

Tragedies occur in different forms and affect everyone differently. It might be a situation that occurs in your personal life, or it could be a global event you watch unfold through media coverage. Both can cause an intense emotional response and impact your ability to function in all areas of your life, including school, home, and work. In the midst of a tragedy, it can be hard to maintain your normal routine. Here are some suggestions to help you cope with challenging times.

Take Time to Process

You might not even know what emotions you are feeling. Give yourself time to process. There are no right or wrong emotions. When emotions do come up, allow yourself to feel them and work through them. It might be helpful to write down your thoughts or what emotions you are feeling. Remember, you will not feel like this forever; even grief is temporary.

Seek Support

You might find it difficult to concentrate on your schoolwork right now. Don't hesitate to reach out to your advisor and professors to let them know you are going through a difficult time. You might not be thinking clearly, so they can help you work out a plan. An advisor can also connect you to other campus resources, such as counselors. It might be healing to talk to others about what you are experiencing and feeling.

Do What You Can

Though the circumstances of the situation may be beyond your control, look for ways to help. When experiencing intense emotions, often it is constructive to act and help others when possible. For instance, if a classmate or loved one is having a hard time, what could you do to offer them support? You could offer a study session if a classmate has fallen behind. You could offer to help a family member around the house or cook a meal if they aren't able to. Alternatively, if you are the one who needs support, don't be afraid to ask for it.

Take Care of Yourself

Don't forget to check in with yourself and practice self-care. Try to eat healthy meals and incorporate fruits and vegetables into your diet. Make sure to get plenty of sleep at night. It's helpful to turn off your devices an hour or so before bedtime to help you wind down and relax. If you already have self-care habits that work for you, make an effort to continue them. For instance, if you typically workout a few times a week, keep doing so. It might seem difficult to follow your normal routine right now, but self-care is crucial during stressful times.

Practice Gratitude

Remind yourself of what you are grateful for. When working through difficult emotions, it might seem impossible to look on the bright side. You might even feel guilty for experiencing positive emotions. However, it is part of being human that we must experience both the light and the dark in this world. Try to think of one or two things you are grateful for each day, even if it seems like something small.

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