



## Dr. Karen Explains...

By Karen Ruskin, PsyD

### Kids and Technology: Should Parents Be Concerned?

Kids and technology is a hot topic often in the news and is frequently discussed by various experts. I recently appeared as the parenting guest expert on FOX News Channel's FOX & Friends FIRST where I shared my insights on a segment entitled "Can Social Media Negatively Impact Your Kids?" This segment received a lot of feedback and many parents expressed their concern, so I decided this topic had to be the next column I write.

We are living in a time of great transition and transformation of how we connect with others. What is defined as a "relationship" or a "friendship"—and what is a healthy balance of technology time vs. face time—is in flux.

There are those who suggest that technology is to blame for the errant youth, especially teens, of today that has not learned how to connect with others. They believe today's tools of technology, iPods, iPads, texting, Facebook, Twitter, have created a decrease in face time—social connection—and have created a culture of people that lack the ability to genuinely connect with each other.

I always find it fascinating when people blame something external (e.g., technology) for behavior, and I find it disappointing and concerning. We should not simply blame technology and ban it from our children's lives; rather, it is up to us as parents to help our children navigate technology and learn to

balance face time and tech time. Let us not forget that the tools of technology often can be and are used as a legitimate and healthy tool of connection when used wisely.

Technology (e.g., texting) and social media (e.g., Facebook) are methods of connection and communication, similar to and different from face time with another. Technology as a form of communication is something our youth culture needs to be skilled at, as it is increasingly used in schools and businesses alike.

Our youth culture also needs to be skilled at face time communication as well. This should not be an "either-or" debate between technology vs. no technology; it should be a "both-and" awareness and process of growth in how to have a healthy balance of these two different communication methods.

#### 5 Tips for Parents

Our job as parents is to teach children to help themselves. Teaching our children to have a healthy tech time/face time balance is important so children do not tech overdose, and/or isolate themselves. The following are five tips parents can use.

1. Dialogue with your child about the importance of connecting with others in face time. Talk with her about how communicating with someone in person feels, to help her believe in the importance of the development of these relationships, not just because you are telling her it is important.
2. Be a role model of a healthy balance of plug-in and plug-out time (e.g., if your child is talking to you, stop texting and listen; put all technology devices away during family time like game night or dinner). There is a time and place for the use of technology. For children to relate to others, to connect, they need both skills, and they need to see you engaging in a healthy balance.
3. Help your child to connect with others by creating connecting opportunities (e.g., suggest your child orders his own meal at a restaurant; discuss socialization lines he can use when a friend's comes over or they go to a friend's house ("thanks for coming to my house," "it was great playing at your house"); schedule after-school friendship time so he can enjoy face time rather than hang out in the house on Facebook; help him to learn the art of scheduling his own get together with friends).
4. Set limits with structured routines. (e.g., no tech time past 5 PM, homework time, unplug during dinner, then can have tech time again).
5. Spend quality time with your child. It is of great significance to spend quality time with your child with consistency. Parents often report the best "babysitter" is technology, and then are annoyed when their child is using it too much. Make the time and take the time to genuinely

connect with your kid.

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