**Manage Your Child’s Tech Use Without Measuring It**

Like most parents I’ve met, you’re probably tired of fighting with your child every time their screen time is up and they need to stop playing a game or put down the iPAD. Technology seems to have taken over your family and life. The most sustainable and powerful solution to this problem is a family technology plan. Creating a family tech plan means that you evaluate your child’s technology use, how it influences social or emotional growth, where do academics come into play, and how to actualize your parenting values. That’s a tall order. To start, I’d like to ask you to back up from the every day battle with technology and reconsider how you measure it.

Instead of measuring screen time, instead try tech breaks. What is a tech break?

* A block of time during which no technology is used.
* The increment can range from minutes to hours. Your child will be more compliant if you collaborate on a specific schedule determined in advance (i.e. 1:00-2:30 pm, Saturdays).

Here’s the idea:

* Parents fear that their children are disengaged, choosing technology over activities like spending time with friends, exploring nature, drawing, or playing with the dog. A pure, focused break from technology is a chunk of time that can be used to engage in these other important aspects of life.
* Tech breaks are completely free of technological distractions, so the child is forced to find something else to do. This allows other interests to rise to top priority; once they’ve re-engaged in a non-tech hobby a few times they remember how much they enjoy it and want to do it more.
* Measuring breaks from technology, “OFF” vs. measuring your child’s screen time, “ON” makes for easier transitions and less parent-child conflict. You will still have conflict over technology, but it won’t be the center of your relationship.

What’s the value of measuring time away from technology vs. tracking screen time? Isn’t this just a matter of semantics?

* Adults and children use numerous devices, concurrently. It’s logistically difficult, if not possible to measure a child’s actual time interfacing with a screen.
* Parents end up not recording total screen time, and the child gets a false sense of the time they are using devices, being held accountable for less time then their actual use. The screen time rule becomes irrelevant to the child when not enforced by the parents.
* Parents become the custodian of screen time, measuring and managing, “reminding”, at the beginning and end of screen time. These transition periods, off and on devices, causes the most conflict between parents and kids and ultimately don’t teach children how to engage in responsible and balanced technology use.

Won’t my child say, “I’m bored!” and torture the entire family with complaints during their tech breaks?

* Tech breaks provide an opportunity for your child to be BORED, aka UNDERSTIMULATED. They aren’t used to this, so it may feel uncomfortable at first.

This is similar to how adults feel at the beginning of a beach vacation. It’s hard to unwind, and you may feel incongruence between your internal mood and your external environment (Inside: harried, overwhelmed. Outside: beach, no obligations.)

* Tech breaks reduce sensory input, allowing children to have thoughts and feelings about their day, relationships, aspirations etc. instead of pushing emotions aside, anesthetizing them with technology.
* Digging out the art supplies, finding sports equipment to play outside takes more effort than picking up an iPAD. They need to get into the habit, and learn (through experience) the value of a balanced life. It takes time for children to feel the benefits of the extra effort.

To learn about how to build a family technology plan, or register for Parenting the Plugged-In Child webinar or small-group class, visit at LanaGollyhorn.com or email Lana at Lana.Gollyhorn@gmail.com.