



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Making Time for Family: Balancing Media Consumption

Common Questions for Parents and Grandparents

Human Development and Family Studies Extension

To create a healthy home, it is important to be intentional about spending quality time together as a family. But this can be difficult in our media-saturated society. Video games, television, cell phones and other media have become a big part of our daily lives and vie for our attention. Here are some tips on moderating media and creating a healthy, balanced home.

What does it mean to be intentional in family life?

It's easy to move through our daily lives without really thinking about why we do what we do. This is living "without intention." When we act with purpose and thoughtfulness, we live with intention. It's easy to act without intention. For example, maybe we participate in an activity without considering how it impacts family time. Or, maybe we choose what is easier rather than best, such as choosing to watch TV instead of sharing a family dinner — it's relaxing, but probably not best for your family. Being intentional in

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family life means making a commitment to building a sense of connection, love and community in your family.

Why be intentional?

Actively carving out time for family and building relationships between family members will bring everyone more joy, love and fun. By acting with intention, you create a safe and loving environment for your children or grandchildren to thrive in, and you model how to be a successful adult.

Why is it important to be intentional in making media choices for my family?

First, acting with intention does not mean totally excluding media from your

life! But it's important to make deliberate choices about the media your family consumes. Computer use, video games and cell phones can negatively impact family members' connection with one another and the community. Living with intention means limiting the amount of time you and your family spend with media. Replace time spent "plugged in" with family activities, such as talking, cooking, hobbies, walks, volunteering, storytelling, talent shows...with a little imagination, the possibilities are endless. "Unplug" with your children or grandchildren in the evenings.

Consuming media without thinking about it can allow it to become a dominant force shaping your children's values. It is your role to protect them from harmful or inappropriate values reflected in media. At the same time, you need to expose your children to a meaningful world outside of their family. These two objectives can sometimes be at odds. Evaluate the values reflected in media such as TV, video games or movies. Do they promote violence, promiscuity, irresponsibility or meanness? Or do they reflect your own values?

How can I make smart choices about media?

Consider the ways in which various media impact your family. Does it impact interaction among your family members? Does it connect you or disconnect you? What values are reflected? How will you address values that are different from your own? For example, advertisements often promote happiness through consumerism. Discuss this idea with your children or grandchildren. Do certain video games or movies esteem violence, stealing, addiction or disrespect? The first step in acting with intention is being aware of media content.

Can I use media to connect with my child or grandchild?

A lot of media are excellent for connecting with your family. First, learn how to use media, such as email. If you have a cell phone, learn how to send text messages. You can ask your child or grandchild to teach you how to send a text message, email or even post a comment on a blog. This demonstrates that you respect your child's or grandchild's knowledge. If your grandchild enjoys video games, find a game that you can play together. Try using media to help manage busy schedules and open the lines of communication.

You can also use media to find new information and create a family activity. The Internet is a nearly infinite resource of information. For example, try looking up the different kinds of trees or birds in your state; visit a local park or walk around the neighborhood and identify the birds or trees. You can also visit a community Web page to find nearby activities that your family can participate in together.

Should I set rules for media or computer use?

Used without intention, media can negatively impact your family and lead to conflict for several reasons. First, conflict can arise when your teenager is the "expert" in a new technology. Your teenager may use this knowledge to establish autonomy and show independence. However, this can reverse family roles and cause tension. Second, siblings may argue over who gets to use the Internet or other media. Finally, if you have a negative attitude toward a new technology, conflict about its use is more likely. This is particularly true if your negative feelings are a result of not understanding the technology.

Become familiar with using computers and the Internet. Ask your child or grandchild to teach you, or you can take a basic course at your local library, school or community group. This way,

you can better understand the risks of using the Internet.

Also consider creating rules for computer use. Your children or grandchildren are more likely to accept the rules if they take part in creating them. Create rules that directly respond to problems that have arisen from having a computer at home. Has computer use limited family time? Create specific "no computer" hours, such as during meals or for the first hour after coming home from school or work. You can also limit the amount of time spent on the computer during one sitting. If your grandchild spends several hours a day on the computer, that's probably too much! Above all, model good behavior. It is not effective to create rules for computer use, and then spend hours yourself watching television each night.

References

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