Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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For many years, parents have been stressing about screen time and their kids. In an instant, things have changed. The pandemic hits, and now screens are a lifeline to school, learning, friends, and extended family. Now that school and learning has gone digital, how are you going to help your children manage their screen time? Below we will look at some tips for managing screen time this year. So even though we might not cherish the idea of our kids sitting in front of a computer screen for hours each day, parents will need to adjust the way they think -- and talk -- about screens if we want our kids to thrive during this time of transition.

Here is a trick: Call their activities what they are. When you have a common vocabulary for their daily activities, such as "playtime," "work time," "friend time," "family time," and "downtime," you can communicate a lot more clearly -- and honestly -- about what your kid is doing, what they should be doing, and what they want to be doing. This reframes the "screen time" conversation into which elements make up a healthy life -- one that balances learning with play, exercise with relaxation, and responsibilities with social time. Here are some ideas for getting on the right track for the school year -- whatever it looks like.

To keep them accountable
Create a digital learning agreement. Sort of like a cellphone contract or media agreement, a digital learning agreement is a document you create with your kid to establish school-year guidelines you both agree to, with consequences for noncompliance. Ask your kid to consider what they have to do (hit their daily reading targets, i.e., "work time") and what they want to do (meet friends on Fortnite, i.e., "friend time"). Record these goals on your digital learning agreement so your kid knows how much time to allot for each thing.
Say: "If you need two hours for homework, what time do you need to start in order to meet your friends by 7:30 p.m.?"

To support your rules
Discuss parental controls. Let's be honest: Kids will need your help to ensure Fortnite playtime does not bleed into school time. You cannot monitor everything at once -- especially when kids are spending so much time online -- so you may need the extra eyes, support, and peace of mind parental controls offer. Using your common vocabulary for their various screen activities, explain why you are using parental controls -- and what your kid can do to demonstrate that they no longer need them.
Say: "I use parental controls to keep you focused during schoolwork, make sure you get enough sleep during downtime, and don't get sucked into an app or a game you have a hard time stopping during playtime. When you have shown me you can manage those things without the parental controls, I'll take them off."

To rest
Set up device-free times and zones. If you are not careful, devices can spill over into all aspects of your family's life, especially if you are basically doing everything online. Lean into downtime by making some spots in your home off-limits to tech. This gives everyone a needed break -- and a moment to think more deeply about what devices are good for and what they are not so good for. Your kids may appreciate the structure, and you can spin tech-free time as a family value. Say: "Technology allows us to do so much, but downtime is important for our family to connect without devices and be able to enjoy a dedicated place where you don't have to be 'on'."

To care for their emotional well-being
Plan for check-ins and device spot checks. Last year, you may have worried about your kid socializing online. This year, it is a relief they can use Zoom, Messenger, and even games to socialize with friends they cannot see in person. But relationships -- especially in the tender tween years -- can be tough to navigate when they are happening solely through text and video chat. Check in on their social lives, learn what tools they are using, and discuss the environments in which they are interacting. Help them think through any trouble spots and what they might do -- say, mute a problematic friend for a while -- to avoid drama. By showing interest, you give them openings to share any challenges.
Say: "What's happening with your friends? Has there been any drama? I'm happy to help you think through how to handle any issues."

To stay healthy
Get some physical activity -- away from screens. It does not have to be every day, but make sure you are achieving a balance of online and offline activities throughout the week. You can incorporate physical activity into your family time or let your kid be in charge of their own exercise. Try Simon says, friendly races, silly walks, or calisthenics.

Digital learning may be around a bit longer than we think. When your child goes back to in-person learning at school, these tips, and strategies to manage their screen time can remain in place. This helps to give parents one less thing to worry about.

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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