

PRINCE Leadership MONTHLY



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Screen Time

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Screen time. According to the English Oxford Living Dictionary (online version), the term is defined as “time spent using a device such as a computer, television, or games console”.

How much screen time is too little? How much is too much? How much screen time supervision is necessary? Who determines what devices (and at what age) are appropriate, necessary, or even safe for a child? If a teacher assigns a child a research topic, is it necessary for a parent to police that screen time like he or she would recreational use? If you are a parent in this, the 17th year of the 21st century, these and a myriad of other technology-related questions constantly plague you. As if settling comfortably on answers to questions like these is not difficult enough, consider the following:

3- The number of hours an average child spends watching TV per day.

5 to 7- Coupled with TV time, the average number of hours a child spends interacting with electronic devices, in general, per day.

10.3- The estimated age at which the average child receives his or her first smartphone.

2-5- (Shockingly) The age at which 25% of children are given their first smartphone.

Some of you are “members of the choir,” and though you may be surprised, you are not challenged by these figures. You are “old school,” and proud of it. On the other hand, some of you are shocked. Your head is spinning. Seeing numbers like these makes you feel a little out of touch with the times. Yet others of you know the trend implied by the above statistics cannot be healthy, but you have always trusted

the feedback you get from your child or the parents of your child’s friends. Your family abides by good, wholesome, Christian values. You are part of a church that is in the know about these and other current issues. You have your child in a Christian school, for Pete’s sake! Deep down you might even be thinking, “So what? Does any of that really matter, especially if pretty much everyone seems to be doing it?”

The statistics regarding hours of screen time are not really new, and most of us have seen the smartphone ownership age dropping steadily for the past 15-20 years. (I remember my son petitioning his father and me for a pager when he was in 10th grade. “That way you can always find me when you need me,” was his rationale for obtaining one. He did not get a pager. Child number two, a daughter, was given a cell phone shortly after she began driving, which was as much for her father’s and my sanity and security as it was for her right to be counted as a member of the cellular world. Child number three got her first phone as a middle schooler {if memory serves me, it was a



“flip phone”} so she could “call when she was done with practice.”) 10 year olds are still pretty dependent upon their parents for their every need, so it’s unnecessary to have the ability to call to say they aren’t going to be home by curfew or that they have just been assigned extra suicides at the end of basketball practice, so don’t come for another 30 minutes. Most likely, it’s not the “phone” part of the smartphone

that has parents of young children plunking down whatever the asking price of the latest iPhone or Android is. Most likely, it's all the other things that a smartphone will do that have our population becoming smartphone owners years before they have even had their wisdom teeth removed.

Lest you write me off for meddling in the personal affairs of parents, let me quickly get to the point of this line of reasoning. British American author and motivational speaker, Simon O. Sinek, speaks to the effects of technological devices on the brain. Research, Sinek states, shows that interaction with a cell phone (not so much the talking feature of the phone, rather the texting and social media platforms as well as the endless supply of game applications that smartphones enable the user to utilize) triggers the brain to release dopamine, which is the exact same chemical released when one smokes, drinks, or gambles. (According to Wikipedia, "The brain includes several distinct dopamine pathways, one of which plays a major role in reward-motivated behavior. Most types of rewards increase the level of dopamine in the brain, and many addictive drugs increase dopamine neuronal activity.") While smoking, drinking, and gambling carry age restrictions, as well as social and moral stigmata, cell phone usage, including social media and gaming, do not. Sinek maintains that through smartphones, users have access to a highly addictive dopamine-releasing stimulant virtually unaccompanied by warnings concerning any danger whatsoever.

The modern marvels of technology have brought us so many wonderful conveniences and have made us capable of stretching our limited capabilities beyond what the world could imagine just 50 years ago. Of all the technological developments just since the mid 1970's I think I appreciate my iPhone the most. Having the world at my fingertips through this device that fits into the palm of my hand is nothing short of a miracle. But with virtually every other beautiful gift since the dawn of time, unwise use of the gift can turn what was meant for good into a source and object of harm. As the guardian of your children for more than 50% of their waking hours, we pledge to foster healthy technology habits in them as we seek to train them in the way that they should go. Our prayer and hope is that we walk in step with the values and boundaries you set for your children. In concert, we work to weave a three-stranded cord that won't be easily broken as we teach our children responsible use of technology.

Resources and References

English Oxford Dictionary (www.oxforddictionaries.com)
American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org)
"The Guardian" Guardian News and Media (www.theguardian.com)
Tech Crunch (www.techcrunch.com)
"Children and Smartphones, What's the Right Age?" (www.tomsguide.com)
"Simon Sinek on Millennials in the Workplace." (www.YouTube.com)

