

A Godly Solution for Families to Survive the Age of Distraction

Ding. A text comes in.

You have 10 minutes to eat before hopping in the car to head to soccer. In the car, your younger children argue over who gets the tablet to play games. Your preteen—who stormed out of the kitchen earlier because you “weren’t listening” while you finished a text—is so engrossed in Instagram that you can’t get her to talk to you about her day.

Distraction is tearing at the seams of family relationships more than ever before. How do we use phones, devices and social media as tools, without letting them encroach into emotional and relational space that rightly belongs to God and to those under our roof?

How do we limit outside commitments—even good ones—for the greater goal of nurturing the souls of the next generation face to face?

Parents Have Too Many Demands

Without meaning to, smart phones and social media have set up unrealistic relational expectations. Intended to aid convenience, they also make our lives completely accessible. Online, we see the very personal joys and needs of hundreds of people each day, and it is hard not to feel responsible to help each one. Add to the mix the everyday commitments: class parties, athletic and academic overkill, and commitments at church.

Our on-demand culture is just that: demanding. We feel subconscious pressure to be involved, have our kids involved,

and be an activist for endless causes. It is hard to follow through on one expectation before the next begins. The result is stress and all its consequences: irritability, impulsivity—things that break down rather than build up relationships.

Have you ever stopped to ask God if the expectations you have for yourself are the same ones He has for you?

1. Embrace limits. Every time you say yes to something you may not want to do, it can keep you from saying yes to what you really feel called to do. Every time you answer a text or scroll through social media, you are making a choice to disengage from where you are and who you are with at that moment to give attention to others.

Limits are actually a God-ordained principle. He established cycles of night and day and made our bodies to need rest. All of creation—including His beautiful gift and example of Sabbath rest—gives us encouragement to make informed choices about how we spend our time.

That is not to say that we should say no to everything and never connect online, but we should think of our default being no rather than yes. Perhaps we should ask God, like David did in Psalm 119:133, to direct and steady our steps. Sometimes it is better for your spouse, your kids and your own heart if you put down the phone or say to a request with “Thanks so much for thinking of me. I can’t this time.”

2. Question everything. So many times, we do what our culture pushes forward without even asking ourselves whether we think the popular thing is a good idea. We snicker at our pictures with big hair in the 80s and too-big V-necks in the 90s. We did that to ourselves! Why do we throw ourselves into the cultural current without thinking?

Before participating in the next new time-saving device that will take weeks to log on and learn, consider whether you

really need or want it. Will it ultimately enhance relationships and save time, or is it a novelty you are proud to know about and attain before others? Will it matter in five years?

6 Ways to Make Time for Your Family

- Get outside every day—and that doesn't mean from the house to the car. Breathe in fresh air with your family! Play Frisbee® or ladder ball, sweep the porch or walk around the block.
- Choose one or two family traditions to include in everyday life, such as fruit fondue or another special dish once a week, or notes in lunchboxes that say, "Tonight at dinner I'm going to tell you about a time I [funny childhood triumph or mistake]." Give your kids a reason to look forward to having one-on-one time with you.
- Require homework, practice and chores be complete before entertainment starts.
- Use laptops, tablets or phones in rooms with doors open. At any time, spouses should be allowed to check up on each other and children's online habits and connections. Regularly ask, "Did you see anything online that made you feel troubled or down? Did anything fun and exciting happen with your friends on (social media site)?" Maintain an openness and accountability related to devices.
- Spend one-on-one time discussing anything other than the schedule with each family member every day, even if it is just five minutes. Do not give third-tier people time your family deserves.
- Get in the habit of praying together at the end of the day. Work on memorizing a Bible verse every day for a month, or read a picture Bible together. Prioritize time with God over the screen. We make time for media; we must model making time for our Creator.

When you put down your phone, wonderful things can happen in relationships. Don't apologize for the focus, down time and family time you have. That is a hard-won prize, and it took courage to find it.

Healthy Guidelines for Pre-Teen Device Use

With a list of drawbacks—including radiation exposure, sight and hearing concerns, emotional health, and personal safety—device and social media use is a decision to think and pray about, for yourself and your children.

For generations, children have used the illogical argument, "But everybody else does it," to pressure parents to cave. Be brave! You are the parent. Firmly decide on and communicate guidelines:

- How much daily time is acceptable
- Which websites you will allow
- What responsibilities must be met before earning screen time
- What parental controls you will establish {eo}

Article courtesy of *ParentLife* magazine.

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