



Taming Techno-Tantrums: A Webinar for Worried Parents

Webinar Summary by Dr Kristy Goodwin



How technology caters for kids' and teens' basic human needs?

Self-determination theory suggests that we have three fundamental human needs:



CONNECTION- we're biologically wired for relational connection. We want to feel like we belong.



COMPETENCE- as humans we seek to control the outcome and we want to experience mastery.



CONTROL- as humans we want to self-initiate and self-regulate our own actions.

How does technology prey on kids' psychological vulnerabilities?



BAD FORECASTING- we under-estimate how long tasks will take to complete.



LOSS AVERSION- kids and teens don't want to miss out, so they often suffer from FOMO. This keeps them in a cycle of constantly checking in (social media) and playing (gaming).



INTERMITTENT VARIABLE REWARDS- like poker machines, many games and social media platforms offer variable rewards and these can cause users to become obsessed or dependent.



ALTERED STATES- technology often alters kids' and teens' physical states (increased heart rates, hits of adrenaline etc) and this activates the sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight mode of thinking).





Why do kids throw techno-tantrums & strategies to prevent them?



DOPAMINE- the brain gets flooded with the positive, feel-good neurotransmitter ‘dopamine’. This neurotransmitter hijacks the prefrontal cortex (logical part of the brain) making it harder for kids to make logical and rational choices.

STRATEGIES-

Appealing transition activity- physical activity (walk, bike/scooter ride), Lego.

Cognitive priming- warn your child that their screen-time will soon end. E.g. “When you’ve finished this game/battle I’d like you to turn it off.”

Locus of control- allow *them* to switch off the device.



NOVELTY- the brain is wired for things to be ‘new’ and interesting.

STRATEGIES-

Boredom- your child *needs* boredom. It allows the brain to enter mind-wandering mode.



STATE OF FLOW- kids become so engrossed with what they’re doing they lose track of time.

STRATEGIES-

Give them quantities (not a time limit)- e.g. “You can get to level 7 in the game.” “You can have eight Fortnite battles.” “You can watch two episodes.”

Use timers- use a clock app, a microwave timer to set an external reminder that screen-time has ended.



STATE ON INSUFFICIENCY- the state of never feeling ‘done’ or complete. There’s always another YouTube clip they can watch, another level they can get to in the game, or another refresh of social media.

STRATEGIES-

Give them cut off times and hard end points- rather than prescribing an amount of time, specify the cut-off time (and set a timer to remind you and them). E.g. rather than saying you can play for one hour, note the starting time (4pm) and then specify the end time (5pm).

Predetermine what they’ll do- before the device is switched on, have your child set their intentions for what they’ll do online.



HYPER-AROUSSED NERVOUS AND SENSORY SYSTEMS- time on screens often over-stimulates the sensory and nervous systems (the online world is like a sensory smorgasbord), so kids/teens need to self-regulate and calm down after using devices.

STRATEGIES-

Physical activity- boost serotonin and dopamine levels AND expel testosterone and cortisol.

Rough & tumble play- helps regulate the sensory and nervous systems. Also develops executive function skills (i.e. impulse control).

Green-time after screen time- time in nature calms the brain as it’s slower paced.

Deep breathing- deep tummy breaths activate parasympathetic nervous system.

Timing- avoid fast-paced, rapid-fire screen use before school and sleep.

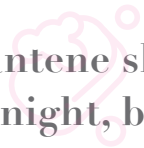


KEY TAKE AWAY MESSAGE-

Parents need to be the pilot (not the passenger) of the digital plane.



Taming tech is like Pantene shampoo- “It won’t happen overnight, but it will happen.”



In many instances (but certainly not all), unhealthy tech habits have built up over time. Therefore, rectifying these habits will also take time. Be firm and consistent with your boundaries, crowd out unhealthy habits and in many instances, these behaviours can be reversed. Of course, please seek medical help if your child’s or teen’s unhealthy tech behaviours continue or adversely impact on their wellbeing.

Four super simple strategies to develop healthy tech habits-



BOUNDARIES- what, when, where, with whom, how and for how long kids can use screens.



BASIC NEEDS- ensure that screen time doesn’t displace kids’/teens’ basic needs (e.g. relationships, sleep, play, physical activity etc).



BOREDOM- allow opportunities each week for kids to become accustomed to being bored.



BALANCE- their online and offline worlds, provide green time and screen time.



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