Raising Boys in a Digital World

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Raising boys in a digital world is concerning and confusing. Why? As kids, most of us had predominantly analogue childhoods where we stared at the sky and not a screen! However, we've been forced to raise boys in a digital world that is foreign to many of us. It's the first time in history where our boys know more than us about a topic. We're frequently given conflicting (and often inaccurate) advice in the media and by professionals when it comes to navigating the digital world with our sons. We wrestle with the fact that our boys will inherit a digital world, so 'digital amputation' simply isn't an option (nor would it make you very popular with your son!). Yet, we're unsure as to how we can allow our boys to embrace technology, whilst still preserving and protecting their childhood and adolescence. This eBook summarises some of the key points addressed in the seminar **Raising Boys in a Digital World**, my signature talk that helps worried parents and professionals raise thriving, healthy boys (without suggesting that you ban their phone, laptop, or gaming device). If you'd like to watch a recording of this seminar (or any others), click **here**.

Parents need to be the pilot of the digital plane.

To develop healthy technology habits, boys need their parents/carers and educators to be the pilot of the digital plane and *not* the passenger. When adults assume the role of pilot they help their son navigate the digital terrain. Even though many parents and educators may feel ill-equipped to be the pilot due to our perceived lack the technical skills and knowledge, we have two things they don't yet have:

(i)   life experience; and

(ii)   a fully developed prefrontal cortex (the part of the brain that's responsible for high-order thinking, logical decision-making and impulse control.

The prefrontal cortex is the part of the brain that isn't yet online: your son's prefrontal cortex isn't *fully* developed until his late twenties (as a mother of boys, I feel your despair!) This part of the brain is the CEO, or traffic-control system. It's responsible for impulse control, working memory and mental flexibility. This is one of the reasons why we need to actively supervise and guide our son's online activity- his lack of impulse control means he will post things online he'll later regret, or access things he shouldn't. This is why we should delay the introduction of social media and be actively involved in our sons' digital lives. Boys have always been risky and impulsive. However, today their digital mistakes have 'digital DNA' attached to them.

When parents and educators are the pilot of the digital plane, they can help boys deal with turbulence (which he'll inevtiably experience at one time or another), *without* crashing the plane. When boys go in the wrong direction online (which is a normal rite of passage as a boy or adolescent), parents can help them course-correct. When our sons are facing scary digital dilemmas, (like cyber-bullying, exposure to pornography, violent or inappropriate content) they'll come to the pilot and not fellow-passengers to help them. However, they'll only do this if parents and educators are sitting in the pilot's seat (and also, not using screen-time as a punishment tool).

As pilots of the digital plane, parents need to establish and enforce healthy **BOUNDARIES**. When boys have firm and consistent boundaries they're more likely to develop healthy technology habits that will stand them in good stead for the digital future they'll no doubt inherit. And even better, you don't need to ban or avoid screens (and your son will love that!).

Our sons need boundaries not only around *how much* time they spend with digital devices, but also around *what* they can access on their screens, *when* they can and can't use screens, *where* they can and can't use screens, *how* they use screens and *with whom* they interact with online. When parents, carers and educators esablish and enforce (this is the tricky part) these boundaries it helps our boys develop healthy technology habits where they become a master of the media and not a slave to the screen.

Some of the major concerns facing our boys growing up tsunami of screens are outlined below. If parents and carers are in the pilot's seat then we can help them tackle these issues.

Physical health

The premature introduction, excessive or incorrect use of screens can have an adverse impact on boys' sleep (and subsequent learning and mental health), physical activity levels and phsyical skill development, vision, hearing and posture. Our boys need firm and cocnsistent boundaries around how much time they can spend with digital devices to ensure that their basic physical health and deveopmental priorities aren't displaced by screens.

Pornography

It's no longer a matter of 'if' but 'when' your son will encounter pornography. There are serious physical health and legal issues relating to boys accessing and/or distributing pornography. We have to talk to our sons, as awkward as it may make us feel, about pornography and how it's an unrealistic depiction of loving, consensual sexual relationships. Our boys have mirror neurons and imitate what they watch and are also being desnesitised because of the amrount and type of pornographic conetent they're watching.

Playing

The male brain is particularly suceptible to the 'addictive potential' of video games. The striatum, an important part of the brain's reward pathways, is sensitive to rewards in adolescents, meaning our teenage boys are particularly vulnerable to the rewards gamig offers. Many boys are playing anti-social and/or violent games and they can sometimes immitate what they see on a screen because of their mirror neurons and the fact that they're rewarded in the game for engaging in such activities. For age-appropriate video game reviews, see Common Sense Media.

Predators

Our boys, including our adolsecent boys, are vulnerable to online predators. We need to constantly remind our boys that they need to know exactly who they're interacting with online and be cautious about divulging private or sensitive information. Parents must do regular screen audits (with their son) to ensure they know who their son is engaging with online. Over time, once trust is established, these audits can be reduced.

Profiles

We need to remind our boys about their digitial DNA. Every comment. social media post, message, email can be digitally archived (even if they delete it). We need to discourage boys from using social media platforms at night because the limited capability of the prefrotal cortex switches off at night and the amgydala (emotional part of the brain) switches on. This is one of the reasons why most cyber-bullying happens at night.

Peers

Cyber-bullying is something parents & educators need to take seriously. We need to explicitly articulate to our boys exactly what cyber-bullying is (many boys claim they thought what they were doing was 'fun' and/or 'harmless') & also how to handle cyber-bullying instances. This is another reason why I strongly discourage using screens as a punishment tool (our boys fret that they'll be digitally-amputated & so don't report cyber-bullying to parents or teachers).

Performance

We need to discourage our boys from media multi-tasking. The research consistently confirms that multi-tasking (continuous partial attention) impedes learning as it burns through glucouse (energy), causes the release of cortisol (stresss hormone that hampers learning) and sends information to the wrong part of the brain for later recall Instead, we need to teach our boys how to mono-task and how to build a fortess around their focus.

We want our sons to be masters of the media and not a slave to the screen. This requires parents, carers and educators to help them develop healthy habits.

HOW MUCH?

One of the biggest 'digital dilemmas' facing parents of boys is how much screen-time is healthy and how much is harmful? Whilst our boys definitely need screen-time limits (otherwise many would walk around with their digital appendage 24/7), it's impossible to prescribe a healthy limit simply based on their chronological age. Instead, we must ensure that our boys' time on devices isn't encroaching their developmental priorities.

Research consistently tells us that children and teens have seven, basic developmental priorities that will ensure their optimal health and well-being (in fact kids and adults share most of the same priorities and basic needs too). It's critical that screen-time doesn't displace opportunities for these basic needs to be met. For optimal health, learning and development your son needs:

Relationships

Language

Sleep

Play

Physical Activity

Nutrition
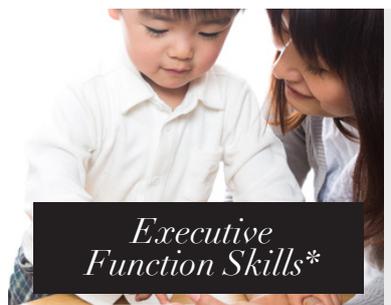
Executive Function Skills*

* impulse control, working memory & mental flexibility

Screens can either help or hamper your son's basic needs.

My simple formula for calculating healthy amounts of screen-time for our boys:

$$24\ hours - sleep* - physical\ activity** - time\ for\ 5\ other\ basic\ developmental\ needs = time\ available\ for\ screen\text{-}time$$

*Sleep guidelines-

**Physical activity guidelines-

5-17 year olds

9-11 hours (5-12 year olds)
8-10 hours (pre-teens a& teens)

5-17 year olds

At least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day.

When it comes to determining 'how much' screen-time is healthy for our boys, we need to remember there's no 'safe' threshold or prescriptive amount that's been scientifically validated. We always need to consider the displacement effect. What's the opportunity cost of seven hours/day on a screen? Is their screen-time interfering with their sleep, social interactions or physical movement opportunities?

It also helps to understand why screens have captivated and engaged our boys. Why do they love playing 6 hours of video games and then emotionally-combust when we ask them to switch off? Technology caters for our three fundamental biological drivers- our need to connect, feel competent and in control.

DEALING WITH TECHNO-TANTRUMS

Many parents endure their son's techno-tantrums. This is when your son emotionally com busts when you ask them to switch off the gaming console, or laptop, or when they become aggressive and frustrated when they switch off screens. Technology has a strong neurobiological impact on the brain and this can explain their digital infatuation (and the 'techno-tantrum' that results when we ask them to switch off):

// digital devices can cause the brain to release **dopamine** (feel-good neurotransmitter) as screen activities are typically pleasurable pursuits.
Strategies to prevent the techno-tantrum-'cognitive priming' (warn your son *before* his screen time will end) and have an appealing transition activity;

// boys often enter the psychological **state of flow** when using gadgets and so their sense of time can disappear (hence, why giving them screen limits is often ineffective because their concept of time disappears).
Strategies to prevent the techno-tantrum- give them quantities as opposed to time limits (e.g. you can have two Fortnite battles, or watch two You Tube clips and then I want *you* to turn if off.);

// the prefrontal cortex has been biologically wired for **novelty** and the online world is *always* new, interesting and immediately gratifying. The real world, in contrast is not. It's slow-paced, requires concerted effort to achieve results and is boring at times.
Strategies to prevent the techno-tantrum- allow your son to regularly experience boredom (brains need a break to enter mind-wandering state.);

// when boys use devices they often enter the **state of insufficiency**. They never feel 'done' or complete. There's always another browser or app they can open, another level in a video game they can reach, or they can constantly refresh their social media feeds or find a You Tube clip. They never get that feeling of being finished (unlike a physical book that has a back cover, or a jigsaw puzzle that they can complete).
Strategies to prevent the techno-tantrum- give your son clear end points and cut-off points. If they *do* understand the abstract concept of time (remember, most boys don't develop this understanding until around 6-8 years of age), give them the time to finish using technology, rather than an amount of time. Eg. Say, "You need to turn off the iPad at 5pm." (and then use an eternal timer to remind them).

// our boys' **sensory and nervous systems become hyper-aroused** when they've been on a screen. There's so much for their brains to process online because the online world is like a sensory smorgasboard).
Strategies to prevent the techno-tantrum- Physical activity (riding their bike, jumping on the trampoline), physically touching your son (releases oxytocin in the brain which is the love hormone), chewing on ice (frozen water) if they're old enough, having a warm shower or bath, or doing something calming (e.g. playing with Lego, reading a physical book, listening to music, or even dancing) are great ways to prevent techno-tantrums from occurring,

In 2017 the Department of Health updated the Australian Movement, Sleep & Sedentary Guidelines, as outlined below (source: www.health.gov.au). I recommend that families use these as a starting point for establishing healthy amounts of screen-time, as opposed to trying to strictly adhere to them.

5-12 YEARS

MOVEMENT
60 minutes/day (moderate to vigorous)

SLEEP (NOT UPDATED IN 2017)
9-11 hours/night
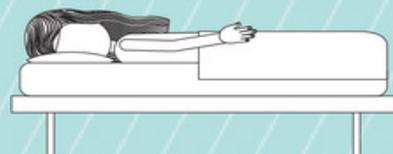
SEDENTARY (SCREENTIME)
No more than 2 hours/day with screens for entertainment
Break up long periods of sedentary activity

12-17 YEARS

MOVEMENT
60 minutes/day (moderate to vigorous)
3 days/week activities that strengthen muscles & bones

SLEEP (NOT UPDATED IN 2017)
8-10 hours/night
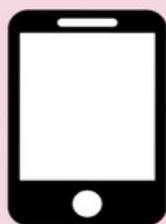
SEDENTARY (SCREENTIME)
No more than 2 hours/day with screens for entertainment
Break up long periods of sedentary activity

If you'd like tool to help you determine a rough estimate regarding healthy screen limits, the American Academy of Pediatrics developed an online tool which can be accessed at https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx. This online tool can assist parents develop a healthy media plan in collaboration with their son. This tool can help you identify a 'ball park' figure when it comes to determining healthy screen-time limits for your son.

WHAT?

Knowing *what* apps, social media platforms, websites and games your son has access to and installed on their digital devices is paramount. As pilots of the digital plane it's vital that parents know *exactly* what boys are doing on their devices and what they're able to access online. Parents need to know the digital playgrounds where boys are congregating.

Remember, your son's impulse control centre is still developing, so they *will* make mistakes online. It's a given. However, now their mistakes now have 'digital DNA' attached and their 'digital footprint; can be long-lasting and sometimes even catastrophic (remember, they don't yet have life experience and a prefrontal cortex to help them consistently make logical and smart decisions). So find the current pain point for your son. Telling him that posting rude messages or nude photos might limit his career prospects is not likely to curb his behaviour. However, suggesting that he may lose his role as the rugby captain, or miss a leadership role at school because of a digital mistake, might help him to realise the permanence and seriousness of his digital mistakes.

The four Ps concerning most parents of teens are predators, pornography, peers (cyber-bullying) and photos (social media). It's our job as parents to ensure that our teens only have access to appropriate content on their devices. Of course, this doesn't mean our child won't see something inappropriate- perhaps they sit next to someone on the bus who shows them something upsetting, or they visit a friend's house and see something that's inappropriate. This is why open and ongoing conversations about technology is important and why using screen-time as a punishment tool is something I strongly discourage. Our kids simply won't come to us if they've seen something inappropriate or upsetting, or if they're a victim of cyber-bullying as they worry they'll be digitally-amputated.

Keeping digital devices in publicly-accessible parts of the family home is essential (more on this in the 'Where?' section), showing an avid interest in your teen's online activities, installing Internet-filtering software on all Internet-connected devices (I personally use and recommend The Family Zone).

If you're unsure of the digital playgrounds in which they're playing the e-Safety Commissioner's website has a wonderful iParent Tool which clearly explains (in simple language what the websites/apps/games are and the potential risks and dangers, legal age restrictions etc). If you're looking for age-appropriate and up-to-date reviews for TV shows, movies, apps, video games then Common Sense Media (a non-for-profit group from America have a review service).

WHEN?

There are two times of the day when parents need to be cautious about teens' technology use: (i) before school and (ii) before sleep. I'm not suggesting that teens need to completely avoid screens at these times, but we do need to be mindful about what they're doing with screens at these two periods of the day.

The use of fast-paced screen action before school can impact their attention spans. Rapid-fire screen action can hyper-arouse the brain and overload the nervous system, making it challenging to focus their attention. Their teacher is no match for the animated characters, or fast-paced action of a screen.

If devices are used before bed they can adversely impact the *quality* and *quantity* of sleep boys can accumulate each night and boys need sleep for optimal learning and mental health. The use of tablets and smartphones are particularly problematic because they emit blue light which suppresses the body's production of melatonin (the sleep hormone), which can delay the onset of sleep. This is problematic for boys approaching puberty as their circadian rhythms biologically alter with the onset of puberty and they naturally fall asleep at later times. However, the use of screens before sleep time can further delay these sleep times.

Bedrooms should be device-free. Your son will tell you he needs his phone in his bedroom as it's his alarm. If this is the case I suggest you buy them an old-fashioned alarm clock. Having devices in bedrooms can impact the quality of their sleep. Each night boys need between 4-6 completed seep cycles (where they move through five stages of sleep). However, having devices in the bedroom can disrupt these sleep cycles (thanks to alerts and notifications), meaning many teens aren't completing a sufficient number of sleep cycles each night. Again, poor quality sleep can have adverse impacts on their cognitive abilities (learning) and on their emotional well-being.

The use of devices at night time is also associated with increased cyber-safety and cyber-bullying risks. At night, your son's prefrontal cortex (logical part of the brain) switches off and the amygdala (emotional centre) of the brain switches on. In this heightened emotional state, your teen is more susceptible to making poorer digital decisions and this is why most cyber-bullying and safety risks occur at night- the logical brain is off and the emotional brain is switched on.

// **Set a digital bedtime**- specify an exact cut-off time when digital devices need to be put away. 60-90 minutes before bedtime is ideal, but even 30-60 minutes will help develop healthy sleep habits.

// **Establish a landing zone**- identify a specific place in your home (kitchen counter, study, buffet, lounge room) where all the digital devices go each night for charging. Keeping bedrooms as tech-free zones is essential. BONUS TIP- make sure they're charging the device and not the empty case.

// **Use blue-light blocking glasses-** Some teens need to use digital devices at night before bed to complete homework or assignments. If so, using **Baxter Blue** glasses can help to prevent eyes from absorbing the blue light. If you use the promo code 'drkristy' you'll get free shipping and 10% discount too).

// **Do a technology swap**- some teens like watching something before bedtime. This is where a technology swap can help. Rather than watching on the tablet device (which emits blue light that can interfere with sleep hormone secretion) watch it on the TV (which doesn't emit as much blue light and teens sit further away from it).

WHERE?

Our boys are often playing in digital playgrounds and no one is supervising. We need parents and educators to know the apps, websites, TV programs and games that boys are using. And the easiest and most logical way to do this is if technology is used in open places in the home. As the pilot of the digital plane, parents need to prescribe exactly where devices can and cannot be used in the home. This is challenging to do, given the prevalence of mobile devices. This is also critical when kids come to your house for a playdate or sleep over (and to enforce if your child goes to a friend's house for a playdate).

Keeping technology in publicly-accessible areas of the home and classroom has dual benefits. First, it helps parents and educators to be involved in children's digital lives. Research consistently shows us that adult involvement (co-viewing) is beneficial for our kids' learning. When parents and/or educators co-view or use technology with kids, it helps them to make meaning form the screen and shows your teen you value what they're doing online. This is a subtle, but powerful way of conveying to your child that technology isn't toxic or taboo and you're really interested in what they're doing. Whilst it may not always be possible to sit down and play a video game with your teen (although that's also great too), having ongoing and incidental conversations with your child ensures that they're actively involved with the media and not simply a 'digital zombie'.

The second benefit associated with teens using screens in publicly-accessible areas of your home and learning space relates to cyber-safety and cyber-bullying. The adolescent brain is wired to take risks- they always have, but now their risks and mistakes have digital DNA attached to them! The neuroscience confirms that teens' brains are wired to take risks because their prefrontal cortex (the part of the brain responsible for logical decision-making) is not fully developed. However, our kids now have access to powerful digital devices which can be used to easily share and curate their mistakes (such as sharing private information, or posting a nude image they'll later regret, or sending a nasty message). If our teens are using devices in bedrooms or hidden away from their parents/carers/educators then they're more likely to engage in risky activities. Remember, it's highly unlikely that your child will be sending sexts whilst they're sitting next to you on the lounge, but much more likely to do this in their bedrooms!

Suggested tech-free zones at home:

// **Bedrooms**- keep bedrooms as tech-free zones. Devices in bedrooms have been associated with poorer quality and quantity of sleep and also increase cyber-safety risks.
// **Meal areas**- keeping devices away from meal areas helps to promote family interaction. Meal-times should be a sacred time for families to connect and interact and phones can act as a digital intruder at the table. For younger children, digital distractions at the meal area, can also compromise their eating habits.
// Play areas- consistent research confirms that background TV can be detrimental to young kids' play and language skills. So if it's not in use turn it off. Background music is different- it can actually help kids learn if it's soft, slow and familiar.
// **Cars**- For short, everyday trips, it's best to keep cars as device-free zones. Car trips are a rich opportunity to have conversations with your son as they're literally held captive in the confines of your car and actually prefer side-by-side (or back of the head) conversation. And if they're at an age where they don't want to talk, then this 'white space' is great for their brains. Constantly processing information form screens can be exhausting and their brains and nervous systems need a break from the sensory stimulation screens provide. For adolescents we also know that if they become accustomed to using devices in the car when they're a passenger, this is a very difficult habit to break when they gain their provisional licence.
// **Bathrooms**- I think this one goes without saying! Hygiene and white space for brains is all I'll say.

WITH WHOM?

It's vital that parents and educators establish boundaries around exactly with whom boys can use screens, both in the physical sense and also online. We'd never consider our boys going to a stranger's house for a playdate, or inviting a stranger into our homes, but we're often allowing our sons to do just this, when they're using online tools without adult supervision.

We need to be aware of who our boys are interacting with and playing with online, as many apps and online games now have chat rooms and other modified aspects of social media. Kids and teens are naturally vulnerable as they want to establish secure peer networks and feel like they belong, so they can easily be preyed upon by online predators targeting youth.

Keeping our boys safe online is amongst parents' chief priorities when it comes to acting as the pilot of the digital plane. Parents need to have ongoing conversations with their sons about *who* they're interacting with online and remind them (because the part of the brain responsible for logical decision-making isn't fully developed until their late twenties) that not everyone on the Internet is who they say they are.

Top tech tips-

// **Have ongoing conversations-** Know exactly what digital playgrounds your son is playing in and supervise so you know who they're interacting with. Know exactly who they're speaking to online and interacting with and let them know if their interactions are appropriate.

// **Tech audits-** conduct regular technology audits *with* your son on an ad hoc basis- scheduling in a regular Sunday afternoon check will soon alert your son to hide and/or delete content that they don't want parents seeing. Be transparent about why you're doing it (because you want to ensure you know who they're interacting with) and always do it *with* them present. If they question your trust or your decision to do this, explain that if they have nothing to hide then there's nothing to worry about. Over time and once trust is established parents will need to do this less frequently.

// **Teach kids online etiquette**- Our boys don't learn social skills and online etiquette though osmosis. We need to explicitly teach them and remind them how to interact appropriately online. Remind them that *every* comment, post or profile has some form of digital DNA attached to it.

// **Don't introduce social media (and phones) prematurely**- giving boys access to social media before the legal age (which is 13+ years for most social media sites), or before they're emotionally and socially ready to cope with the demands of social media is incredibly risky, as they'll instantly be exposed to unfamiliar people. They can also start to seek external validation from social media by posting sexually explicit, inappropriate or risky content just to gain likes and comments. Also, mobile phones are so much more than just a device to make and receive calls- they're now a device that can capture photos, videos and even facilitate Internet activity. You need to ensure your son is capable, responsible and mature to cope with the demands that come with a owning a phone.

// **Encourage them to come to you if they have a problem**- we know that many teens are subject to cyber-bullying or see inappropriate content online and whilst they know they should report it to a parent or teacher, most don't because they're worried about the consequences. Many teens fear that they'll be 'digitally-amputated' (which for them is akin to cutting off their oxygen supply) if they go to a parent or teacher for help. So it's vital that we have open and ongoing conversations with our kids and remind them that they can come to you with any concerns.

HOW?

Vision

Given that kids are spending increasing amounts of time with digital devices and often at younger and younger ages, it's vital that parents and educators ensure that they're using them in healthy and correct ways. Incorrect, excessive or premature use of screens can potential harm a child's visual development. Unhealthy screen habits place children's eyes under many stressors at earlier ages and often for increasing periods of time.

Top tech tips for protecting kids' vision-

// **20-20-20-20 rule** – kids and teens need to take frequent breaks when using digital devices. Every 20 minutes of using a screen, boys need to take (at least) 20-second break away from the screen, blink 20 times (this also helps to lubricate the eyes and prevent computer vision syndrome), to look at something at least 20-feet away (approximately 6 metres which helps to develop depth of vision) and to do something physically active for 20 seconds (star jumps, run on the spot, stretch to help the body calibrate and reposition so no unhealthy postures are adopted).

// **Encourage screen-free breaks outside-** Time in natural sunlight is vital for healthy visual development. Developing eyes need 10-14 hours of natural sunlight per week for healthy vision. Time in nature also gives eyes a much-needed break from looking at things close distance.

Hearing

The World Health Organization (sic) estimates that 1.1 billion people worldwide could be at risk of noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) because of unsafe use of personal music devices including mp3 players and smartphones. NIHL typically develops because of repeated exposure to loud sounds over time (as is the case for many kids incorrectly using headphones).

Boys' consistent use of headphones above safe hearing levels is a huge threat to their hearing. Research confirms that use of headphones above 75dB can cause permanent hearing loss. However, many parents are surprised to learn that most commercial mp3 players can reach more than 130dB (contingent upon the model of mp3 player and brand of headphones used)! Hearing damage is cumulative, which is a potential concern as younger and younger children are now using headphones, meaning they may be susceptible to hearing loss in years to come- we don't yet have the long-term research to confirm this, as yet.

Top tech tips for protecting boys' hearing-

// **Volume control** – Use the settings on the device to set maximum volume levels. Many products do not allow users to set a specific decibel level, but you can set maximum levels based on what 'sounds' suitable. Check with individual manufacturers as to how to do this.

// **Avoid using ear-bud style headphones** – boys should use noise-canceling, ear-muff type headphones (it's not essential that they're the expensive branded headphones that tweens will insist you buy them) as these cancel some of the background noise, making it easier for children to listen to the music without having competing background noise.

// **Limit time with headphones**- boys should not use headphones for more than 60 minutes/day.

// **No headphones when being a pedestrian** –Young children don't typically develop their peripheral vision until they're around 8 years of age so they rely more on their sense of hearing when crossing the road. If they're digitally-distracted with headphones, their sense of hearing is compromised.

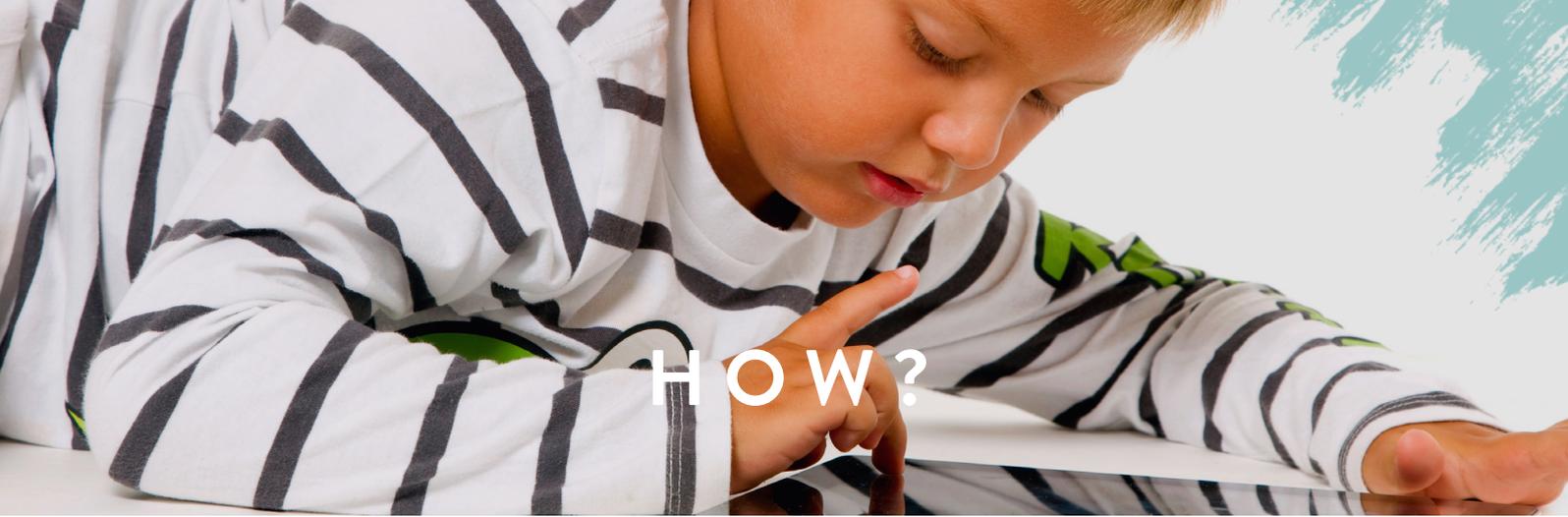
Physical Health-

There are potential risks to boys' physical health if they're using screens excessively or incorrectly. Tech-neck, gaming claw and text-thumb are the colloquial terms used to describe the serious physical ailments that can result from excessive, repetitive or incorrect use of screens. As pilots of the digital plane parents need to teach kids (and remind them constantly) about how to hold and position screens in a way that won't compromise their health.

Chiropractors, physiotherapists and occupational therapists are anecdotally reporting increasing numbers of adolscents presenting with musculoskeletal problems. They attribute this increase to the early introduction of screens, the amount of time children are spending with screens and the adoption of unhealthy ergonomic postures.

Top tech tips for protecting boys' physical health-

// **Encourage regular break**s– Regular breaks away from screens prevent teens' muscles from fatiguing. When they're tired children are more unlikely to adopt poor postures. If children have a break from using a screen and do something physically active in the interim, when they resume using a device they'll be more likely to adopt healthy ergonomic postures.

// **Teach correct ergonomics**– teach adolescents how to adjust desks and work areas to suit their physical needs. For example, when using laptops and desktop computers their feet should be flat on the ground and their knees and spines should be at a 90° angle too. Use chairs with adjustable heights, tilts and lower-back support (or insert a cushion to provide extra support). With mobile devices like tablets and smartphones, encourage children to lie on their stomachs as this keeps their necks in a neutral position (and as an added bonus, they'll naturally reposition themselves as their elbows will tire). Another alternative with touchscreen devices is to use tear-shaped bean bags, as this allows them to bring devices to their eye level while maintaining their posture (just remember to switch the device to airplane mode first before popping it in their lap to reduce any possible risks associated with electromagnetic radiation).

// **Limit the weight of schoolbags carrying digital devices**– many adolescents are now carrying tablets and/or laptops in schools bags as part of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) initiatives. Children shouldn't carry bags that are more than 10% of their body weight. So it's important that parents monitor the weight of kids' school bags and make adjustments where necessary.

FINAL TIPS FOR RAISING BOYS IN A DIGITAL WORLD

// Plan don't ban screens– digital abstinence won't work for your son. We need to teach him healthy and helpful media habits so he can be a master of the media and not a slave to his screen. The only way he can develop these habits is by learning to use devices.

// Have ongoing conversations about technology– we want our boys to see technology as a functional tool and we need to teach them how to use it responsibly. Consistently talk to them about their digital DNA and show an avid interest in what they're doing online (even if it bores you to tears). When we assume an active role in our son's digital life he doesn't see technology as something that is taboo or toxic.

// Avoid using screens as a reward or punishment tool– if we always dangle the digital carrot or use the digital stick it can be ineffective in the long-run and cause other issues too. If we use screen-time as a reward all the time then it elevates the status of technology (when it's already innately pleasurable and desirable for our sons) and it develops a transactional relationship with your son ("I'll be nice to my sister if you let me play on the Play Station."). If we punish our kids by removing their screen privileges then they are very unlikely to come to us when there's a problem online as they're worried we'll cut off their oxygen supply- i.e. digitally amputate them!

// Have firm no-go tech zones– identify the places where you don't want your son using technology. Bedrooms must be one of these places (despite your son insisting that he needs his phone in his bedroom). Digital devices in bedrooms compromise the quality and quantity of your son's sleep. encourage him to use devices in publicly-accessible areas of the home- he certainly won't be sending 'nudes' sitting next to you on the lounge, but much more likely to do so in his bedroom.

// Be the pilot of the digital plane– you have a fully developed prefrontal cortex (logical part of the brain) and life experiences so you're well-equipped to help your son navigate the digital world.

FINAL TIPS

Balance boys' screen-time and green-time.

Technology is here to stay so we need to teach our boys how to harness its potential and also how to mitigate any potential risks. This means our boys must learn healthy and helpful ways to use screens. This is why parents have to be in the pilot seat helping them to navigate the digital terrain. When we help our boys develop healthy technology habits, they can be a master of the media and not a slave to the screen.

OTHER RESOURCES
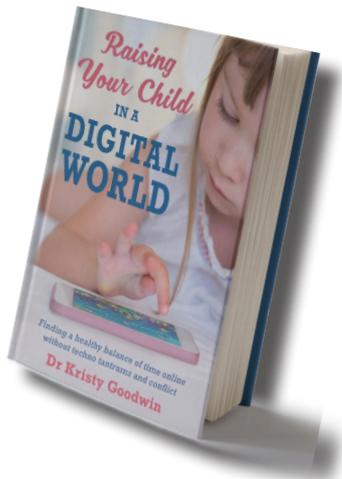
Raising Your Child in a Digital World translates the most current research on new technologies and their impact on young kids into practical and digestible information for parents (and professionals working with families). It busts the myths, explores the benefits of time online and helps parents to successfully guide their children to balance 'screen time' with 'green time' (and alleviate their techno-guilt).

This book finally allows parents to put an end to the guesswork and guilt when it comes to raising kids in a digital world (without telling them to ban the iPad, or unplug the TV). Because digital abstinence is not the solution.

"Dr Kristy shares my concerns around the potential for harm when technology is used too much or inappropriately and in her book she has explored research and common sense to give parents an excellent guide to navigating this strange new world. She guides parents on how to make good decisions in the home while being mindful of what to be careful of at various ages and stages in terms of internet usage. She makes complex information easy to read and understand. This book needs to be in every home where our digital children aged birth to 25 live."

Maggie Dent | Author | Speaker | Parenting Educator

"Impressed by this new book which is well researched and steers carefully and in details around the hazards and harms of too much screen use by children and teens. It's not merely balanced (which can be a copout), but very specific about what to avoid and why, and is based around what children need for their age and stage."

Steve Biddulph | Author | Speaker | Parenting Educator

I have a range of video seminars (watch on-demand) and online resources to help parents manage technology without screen-time turning into scream time. Click here to find out more.

Click on the following links if you're interested in enquiring about me speaking at your school or workplace.

About Dr Kristy

Kristy's on a mission to solve parents' and professionals' digital dilemmas by arming them with facts (not fears) about the impact of technology on kids, teens and adults. She helps parents ditch the techno-guilt and raise happy, healthy kids who thrive online and offline and helps employees and executives manage their digital health. Kristy takes the guesswork and guilt out of raising kids in the digital age by translating the latest research, from a range of disciplines into practical and digestible information, tips, and tricks for parents and educators so that they can feel confident and assured that they're raising healthy, happy and balanced kids in the digital age. Kristy also helps corporations maximise employee health and productivity by teaching healthy tech habits.

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