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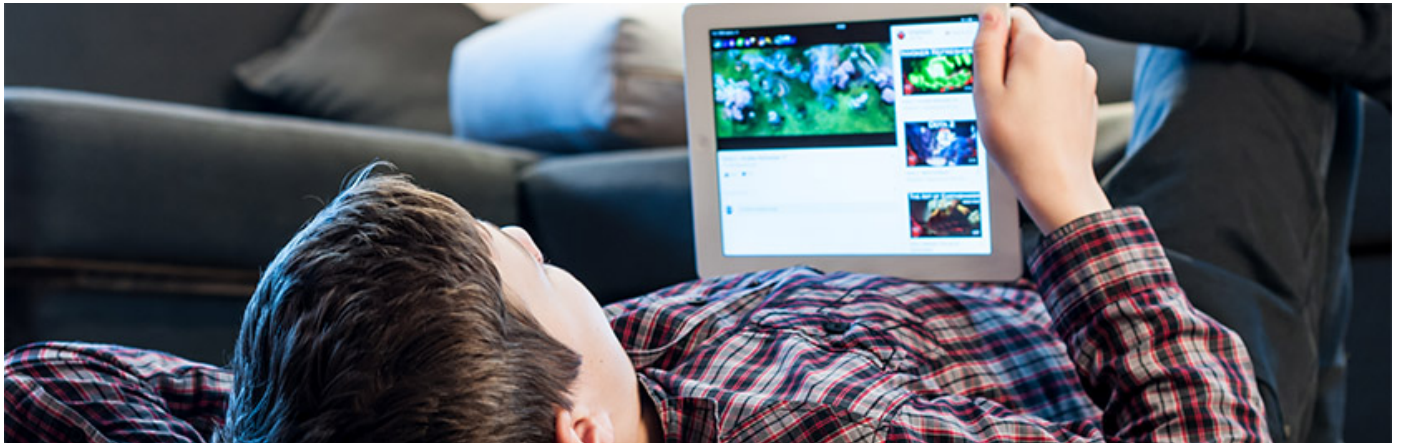
Establishing digital boundaries for the screen generation

Parents need to establish digital boundaries and be the pilot (for primary children) and co-pilot (for adolescents) of the digital plane.

Many parents establish screen time limits for their 'screenagers' (i.e. their children and teens) by stipulating how much time they can spend plugged in. Focusing solely on time is not the only digital boundary to consider. It's best to expand our dialogue beyond screen time as the only metric that's used to assess young people's digital behaviours.

We also need to create boundaries around:

The screens kids use

The most critical boundary parents need to establish with their children and teens relates to what they're doing online. Have conversations about the apps, platforms, games, videos, TV shows and media they consume and create. Visit the eSafety Commissioner's or Common Sense Media's websites to help you understand the various platforms and tools, so you're better prepared to know the risks and lessen some of the potential pitfalls.

The time of day

Establish what technology can be used at different times of the day. Ideally, devices would be switched off at least sixty minutes before bedtime as the blue light can delay the onset of sleep and reduce the quality of their sleep. Minimise exposure to rapid-fire, fast-paced screen action before school as this can hyper-arouse the brain and make it challenging to pay attention in class.

Technology zones

As a family, determine the 'no-go tech zones' in your house such as bedrooms, bathrooms, meal areas and play areas. Encourage them to use technology in publicly accessible, high-traffic areas of the home such as the kitchen, dining or lounge area. A young person is very unlikely to be sending nudes whilst sitting on the lounge or kitchen bench!

The people they interact with

Talk to your child or teen about who they're interacting with online and reassure them that if there's a problem online, they need to come and talk to you, as the pilot or co-pilot of the digital plane and avoid withdrawing screen time as a punishment.

Setting and enforcing firm digital boundaries with children young people is vital if we want them to cultivate healthy digital behaviours. These skills are critical if the screen generation is to thrive in the digital world.

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Dr Kristy Goodwin is a digital wellbeing and performance speaker, author and researcher (and mum who also deals with her kids' techno-tantrums!). She's the author of Raising Your Child in a Digital World, and a media commentator who doesn't suggest that we ban the iPhone, or unplug the gaming console (digital abstinence isn't the solution). Kristy translates research into essential information and realistic strategies for parents to ensure kids and teens thrive in the digital world. For further details visit www.drkristygoodwin.com.