

raising great kids

By resident education specialist Perk Musacchio

# KIDS UNPLUGGED

## summertime and the living should be easy

There is something magical and even therapeutic about summer vacation. With the arrival of summer, comes many opportunities for making memories. Who remembers building forts, catching lightning bugs, cooking s'mores over a campfire, playing kick-the-can in the neighborhood, having a picnic, going fishing, time at the beach or mountains with family or friends, or a special vacation destination? Those memories are etched in our minds and hearts forever. Summer can also be a time to do nothing but relax and have fun.

But then, at some point, every parent will hear, "I'm bored. There is nothing to do." Guess what? Being bored is a state of mind and often results from being "over entertained." People who are more self-aware and have better self-control are less prone to feeling bored, so don't feel like you have to rescue your children when the whining begins. Help them to learn the importance of downtime, feeling a sense of pride from doing simple mundane tasks, the joy of being creative, and most importantly, help them learn what a life without technology can be like. Billy Cox once said, "Technology should improve your life...Not become your life."

Technology can be a blessing and a curse all at the same time. It's super easy for parents to allow their kids to have screen time in order to get a quick job done, make that one phone call or keep them entertained while in public. However, due to a phenomena known as "screen sucking", that time can easily morph into an hour or more and leads to less time engaging in more beneficial activities for healthy development.

The overuse of electronic devices can keep adults tethered to work and disconnected from family and

friends. It can also keep children from engaging in other productive, creative, and important brain building and bodybuilding activities. The more time spent in front of a screen, the more the brain begins to develop in a negative way. It can cause an imbalance in neurotransmitters, which are the chemical messengers that can affect mood, behavior, attention, and learning. Too much screen time can cause changes in the areas of the brain that are involved in emotional processing, compassion, social cues, decision-making, and the frontal lobe where executive function skills are located. The overuse of screen time can affect language development and reading, spelling and writing skills. These are all areas that educators are seeing as becoming increasingly more challenging for students. Kids can easily become "wired and tired" and experience chronic states of high arousal that affects mood, memory and the ability to relate to others. Increasing numbers of teens are reporting feelings of isolation and loneliness due to a lack of face-to-face interactions with peers.

With more and more children and teens becoming addicted to their screens, the term "digital detox" has become a necessary prescription to combat the increase in physical and mental health concerns. Digital detox refers to a period of time when a person refrains from using electronic connecting devices such as smartphones, tablets, computers, and TVs. Digital detox provides other benefits including: reduced stress, increased mindfulness, lowered anxiety, better appreciation of one's environment, improved mental health, increased productivity, good posture, improved core strength, improved gross and fine motor skills, improved reading comprehension, and better social interactions and relationships with people.

The good news is that time spent off screens and in nature can restore focus, lower stress, reduce aggression, and enhance the ability to "read" social cues and body language. One study revealed that 100 preteens took a test to interpret the emotions of people in photos and silent videos. Then half of the kids went to an outdoor camp for five days, where they had no access to screens and lots of opportunity for social interaction. After camp, all the kids took the test again. The campers significantly improved their test scores compared to their peers. In fact, more and more summer camps are popping up that advertise "screen free" camps.

### TIPS FOR DISCONNECTING

1. Start small. First, unplug at mealtime. No screens at the table.
2. Consider a device-free day or time of day.
3. Create digital free places. Keep a certain space in your home, or when on vacation, as a "device-free zone." Perhaps, it's the bedroom. After all, sleep is only enhanced when it is not preceded or interrupted by the light and noise from electronic devices. These devices emit light of all colors, but it's the blue light in particular that poses a danger to sleep. Blue light from screens prevents the release of melatonin, a hormone associated with getting a good night's sleep.
4. Take a gadget-free vacation or at least set ground rules ahead of time.
5. Consider replacing screen time with more interactive activities such as card or board games, arts and crafts, music, puzzles, books, hikes, outdoor fun, and conversation.
6. Lastly—and this one is hard to do if you have strong preferences about what your child is exposed to and how much time s/he spends on electronics—discuss them with daycare staff, babysitters, friends, and family members to create a win-win for everybody.

As Rachel Macy Stafford, a very astute mom, said to her daughter, "Tether yourself. Tether yourself to real people, conversations, scenery, furry animals, books, music, and the great outdoors."

Here are some ideas for a summer curriculum of fun brain and bodybuilding activities to do with your children:

- Engineering: Build a fort
- Physics: Ride a roller coaster
- Math: Follow a recipe to bake cookies
- Astronomy: Gaze at the stars
- Biology: Hunt for frogs, turtles and lightning bugs
- Geology: Collect rocks
- Ecology: Pick up trash and recycle as much as you can
- Vocabulary: Have conversations and play I Spy games in the car
- Literacy: Read to/with your children
- Music: Go to a concert (at church, in the community, at a local school or summer venue)
- Art: Use sidewalk chalk to decorate your driveway
- Physical Education: Go for a daily walk

ANOTHER CHAPTER IN THE  
CHADDS FORD SANFORD CONNECTION

## More than a transfer. A transformation.



Chadds Ford's Melanie Keller was frustrated. Her youngest was just not thriving at the local elementary school. A learning professional herself, Mrs. Keller found the support—for her concerns and her daughter's performance—to be less than acceptable. **Time for a change.**

Just one tour of Sanford, and the Kellers were convinced that this was the learning environment they wanted for all of their children. Since the transfer, all are thriving. The youngest has transformed into an engaged, confident, successful student. The older two have happily transitioned and love their new school, sports, and friends. All three can't say enough good things about their teachers.

Visit Sanford and you'll find a place where challenge and caring live side by side. Where students can be themselves, express themselves and find themselves as they approach learning and life with no limitations.



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