Shattering Myths about Screen Time
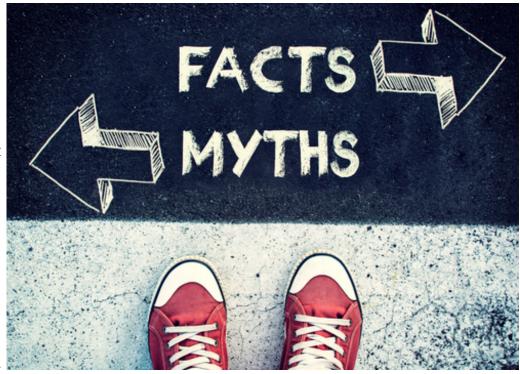
May 21, 2019

This is my second posting about shattering myths about the screen. Check out Myth #1 here

Myth #2. We do not know how screen time can affect our kids so we don't need to be concerned about it until we do.

I was at lunch recently and heard a woman say to her friend, "Did you hear they just reported a new study that says there is no problem with screen time? So, since they don't know, I am not going to worry about it with my kids."

Of course, the reality is that screen time can have positive and negative effects on our kids, so we need to be aware of what they are doing online and how long they are doing it. The truth is there will never be a scientific finding around screen time that will tell you that you do not need to be engaged and working with them to create balance.

One important reason to have a handle on how much time your kids are spending on their screens is the surprising fact that only 21% of youth in the U.S get the nationally recommended 1-hour of physical activity each day. The exercise should include aerobic, muscle building, and impact to help bone strength. Interestingly, about half of high school students take P.E., which has been the case since the early 1990s.

If your child plays a sport, they will have dedicated time to move their bodies during the week. But what about the weekend? Consider talking with another parent (maybe someone you have been wanting to get to know better) to brainstorm ways to do this sports time together such as ultimate frisbee, even if it is just a few of you. One of our team members

lets her son have screen time during playdates after school only after he and his friends have played outside for at least an hour or two. They can shoot hoops at the park, go for scooter rides, or play Nerf Tag. They just have to be outside and active. I have friends whose kids have stopped playing team sports but now ref soccer or lacrosse. That is a great way to both earn money and get exercise on the weekends.

Creating sacred screen-free times and zones takes work, but it is so incredibly worth it.

Your dinner table could be one such a zone. Or, how about a central charging station in the house where phones go at a specific time every night? This will help ensure that everyone has a good night's sleep without the glow of the screen's blue light. Or, like me, you can have the charging spot in your bedroom, just so you know where their phone is—and it frankly, it helps the teen not wander back to the charging stations for one more look at the phone. They can, of course, get social media on a laptop, so this is why we are doing the ongoing work to have conversations to build their own self-limits.

Video games, especially ones popular with our kids like Fortnite and Overwatch, are designed to keep you playing. Last year, the World Health Organization officially recognized gaming addiction as a true condition. It is hard, but setting, and maintaining, strict limits and time frames on gameplay, especially for younger children and tweens, will help them make gaming a *part* of their life instead of their entire life.

For this Tech Talk Tuesday, here are some questions to get you started:

- How much physical movement do we get on average a day (or week) and does the time include cardio, muscle, and bone (high impact)? Ask everyone participating in your TTT.

- Can we do a little change with our screen time this week, such as pick a new short span to have sacred screen-free time? Just to try it for a week. One suggestion is that everyone stays off their device in the morning for the first 30 minutes (it's not easy to do).

- How much time do we play video games a day? A week? How much of this time is spent playing on a phone? What are the nudges that games use to keep you coming back for more?