

Screen Time Challenges

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A young preschooler was trying to get his mother's attention as she scrolled through social media sites on her phone. After trying repeatedly to get her attention, the young boy finally put his hands on either side of her face. Moving her face towards him, he said, "Mommy, I need you to listen to me with your whole face."

This mother was participating in an experiment organized by ABC News. In May of 2019, the network spent six months traveling the country and talking to families, teachers, doctors and even tech insiders to put together a two-hour special about how screen time is affecting us and what we can do about it. The project was headed up and hosted by Diane Sawyer.

You can watch several short reports about what Ms. Sawyer discovered. I would like to first mention a shocking fact that I learned from this report by asking you a question? Do you know how many times a day you look at your phone? If you're like the average American, you unlock your phone around 80 times a day which adds up to about 49 days out of the year! If you think, "That can't be right, that's impossible," at the end of this article you will find resources to help you monitor the screen time usage of yourself and your family.

During the six-month experiment, ABC News ran screen time experiments to see how young children reacted when their parent was distracted by his or her phone. Even though the parents were instructed to ignore the young child for only two minutes, most children got upset, cried or withdrew after less than 30 seconds. Watch a sample here.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7_2K9E2m-w

In another video report, a brave family invited ABC News to come into their home and monitor their device usage for 30 weekend hours. The family was stunned to learn how much time they had spent on their phones and other devices. The good news is that they walked away from the experience with some steps to help make better choices as a family: 1) have a family meeting to discuss what they learned, 2) plan a family outdoor adventure and 3) embrace technology as a way to connect with each other through the day.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=GqeOWatgN9w&list=PLQOa26lW-uI-pNs2w7ie09BET5LY_xDOF

If this issue is a challenge that your family faces or you want to be more aware for the future, there are tools available to help you monitor your own screen time as well as that of your family members. Remember, it is important as a parent that we lead by example. Check out these websites or find other options online. Getting buy in from your kids is key and might include some kind of family discussion or even a challenge to find out what your family's device usage really looks like!

11 apps that help you monitor/reduce your screen time: www.theladders.com/career-advice/11-apps-that-will-help-you-reduce-your-screen-time

Apps to help parents: www.parents.com/kids/safety/internet/best-apps-for-parents-to-monitor-and-limit-screen-time/

Today, our children need our attention and presence more than ever. Making time to connect is a challenge for most families in our rapidly changing world. Navigating phones and other media devices are just one of many issues parents face today.

It is important to remember that despite all the technological advances we have seen in the past 20 years, parents will always be the most important source of information and values for their growing children. Building relationships with our kids takes time, investment, patience and presence.