

News Column  
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Family Media Plans

Just like a countdown for the New Year happens on December 31<sup>st</sup>, a countdown happens for the new school year. Parents, teachers, and youth are excited and full of nervousness. However, with any change in life, stress exists. Stress from the youth about getting the right outfit, if they will make friends, and how to navigate a new and unfamiliar situation. Stress from parents about letting kids go for the first time, how children will react to their new environment, and if all the boxes were checked in getting children ready. Stress from teachers about their new class(es), students' problems, and how to navigate the next nine months with their students. Amidst all this stress and excitement, certain things can get overlooked. One of those things is to set how technology will be used in the upcoming year. The beginning of the school year is a great time to update or begin your family media plan.

A family media plan is a plan that you and your family develop which talks about the rules and guidelines for you and your family on how technology will be used in your home. The outline for family media plans comes from the American Academy of Pediatrics. They provide tools on their website, [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org), to help you get started. One of those things is the media time calculator. This is used to help you discover how much media time is actually going on in your home. Once you've discovered this, you can go to the family media plan tab and begin to fill out your media plan for your family.

Why should you start a family media plan? Family media plans help you set boundaries and regulations that can be enforced. It is suggested to go through your family media plan and set those boundaries and guidelines with your children. Doing this allows them to share their opinions and opens the discussion about what is and what isn't acceptable with media usage. It is also easier to enforce when your children have helped to set the guidelines.

The family media plan goes through many different things such as screen free zones, screen free times, device curfews, what type of shows you choose to watch recreationally, how you will balance online and off line time, having good online manners, how to be good digital citizens, and how to be safe online, and how to balance exercise and health with online and screen time. With each section the family media plan gives you suggestions based on the ages of your children, but those suggestions are just a start.

As technology becomes ever increasingly a part of everyday life and relationships, we need to make sure that children understand and are protected from the dangers of online life. One specific area where you can discuss technology usage is using technology for schoolwork. Your children will be coming home with an iPad, assignments to get onto Facebook, or Twitter and searching the website to engage in information. Using technology for schoolwork is a great thing. It gives youth an advantage over others who may not have had the same opportunity and helps them integrate into the real world. However, setting limits with how technology is used is still a good thing to do.

Adding a section to your family media plan about technology usage for schoolwork can be very helpful. This section can include things like where technology is used. Which sites and for how long the sites are available to be used. Another option to add is media-multitasking. Media multitasking is using multiple media outlets at the same time. According to research done by Common Sense Media, media-multitasking is the use of multiple devices at the same time. For example, watching a tv show in the background while writing an assignment. Research has shown that youth who do this finish their homework slower and with poorer quality. There is however, one type of media multitasking that is still alright. That is listening to music while working. Although, even with music, it is better to play a relaxing or slower tempo playlist versus a party-upbeat playlist.

Media and technology are useful in every aspect of our lives. It is essential to find out how to use technology in a balanced way. It is even more important that as youth go back to school, they learn how to do the same thing. Starting a family media plan can help you get there. Discussing with your children how to set limits and working to keep those as a family will help you learn what to do and how to do it. Create your family media plan by starting where you are and build from there. This new school year is a great time to do just that.