Tips to Help Kids Succeed in a Digital World

Expert advice designed to help you identify a child's digital profile and practical ideas to help children succeed!

By Aubrey Schmalle, OTR/L

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How the Growth of Technology is Affecting our Kids

Over the last 15 years, technology has become a necessary part of life. Smart technology contain Apps for almost everything you might need to stay digitally connected to others, manage finances, play games, listen to music, read books, do homework, collaborate on a project, check email, binge on YouTube Videos, learn a language…..If you can dream it, there's an App for that.

As technology has become a staple in education, leisure time, work, connection to people, and management of personal life, both children and parents find themselves struggling to stay engaged in non-screen activities. With technology constantly notifying us of the need to pay attention to the 500 things going on at once (and that's just on one iPad), our children are being wired for distraction.

Research suggests that the rates of anxiety, depression, and loneliness are climbing. More children than ever are receiving support at school for difficulties with attention in addition to struggling with learning. Children are using Likes and Comments as a measure of significance as they dream of becoming Influencers and making money online. Gamers are playing late into the night, affecting their sleep, ability to learn, and ability to enjoy life outside of the thrill of the video game. This is a digital world that we don't have the habits, boundaries, and strategies to manage and neither do our children. So we end up raising children who are distracted, disorganized, and distraught instead of happy, well-adjusted, and successful.

So let's work together to raise our digital awareness and begin the process of rebalancing the role of technology in our children's lives to help them grow up successfully in a digital world.

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FAST FACTS

From the CDC, DOE and School Violence Reports

Rate of anxiety has increased from 7.1% to 9.4%in teens pre-pandemic

44% teen report feelings of sadness and hopelessness in 2021

The number of children receiving special education is up from 11.6% in 2010 to 15.9% in CT in 2022

Nationally, 15% of kids are receiving special education under Other Health Impaired compared to 12% for Autism

Cyberbullying was at 16% in 2021 vs.8% in 2009 for high schoolers

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Understanding the Impact of Screens and Media

Effects on the Body

Sleep Disruption
Blue light boosts energy and mood but exposure at night can disrupt melatonin production and sleep

Vision Deficits
*Nearsightedness *Dry Eyes *Retinal Damage
*Poor Functional Vision *Computer Vision Syndrome

Postural Deficits and Tech Neck
21% Kids who experience neck and back pain also have eye symptoms.
82% report behavioral and emotional changes

Effects on Learning

Digital Dementia
Storage capacity of smart technology and too much information leads to poor memory skills

Lower Test Scores
Kids who spend MORE THAN TWO HOURS PER DAY on screens get lower scores on thinking and language tests.

Social/Emotional Effects

- Loneliness, depression, and anxiety
- Feelings of failure and inadequacy
- Comparison to others and chasing "significance"
- Bullying - Desensitization to the impact of your words/actions on social media
- Potentially negative outside influences teaching and engaging with children in gaming chats and on social media

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Taking Inventory: What is Your Child's Digital Profile?

Social and Community

This includes socializing with friends and during outings (ex: shopping) where the screen is used for texting or watching videos while waiting vs screen-free time

Family Time

Any time spent with your family including meals and down time at home using screens vs screen free

Play and Leisure

Screen-based vs outdoor play or other non-screen activities

School

Computer-based learning, assignments, Smartboards vs paper-based and interactive learning

Take a moment to shade in how much time is spent using screens in each of these categories compared to how much time is spent on non-screen activities like playing board games with family, soccer practice, and pencil to paper homework.

Does you child watch videos waiting at the doctor's office or while in the car? (Social and community). Does your child have playdates using Roblox? (Play and leisure). Does your child use the Chromebook all day at school? Make sure to consider this as you shade in each category!

What area has the most screen time?

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Pick one category to attack first. Is there a small change you can make to your child's habits and activities to add in more non-screen opportunities?

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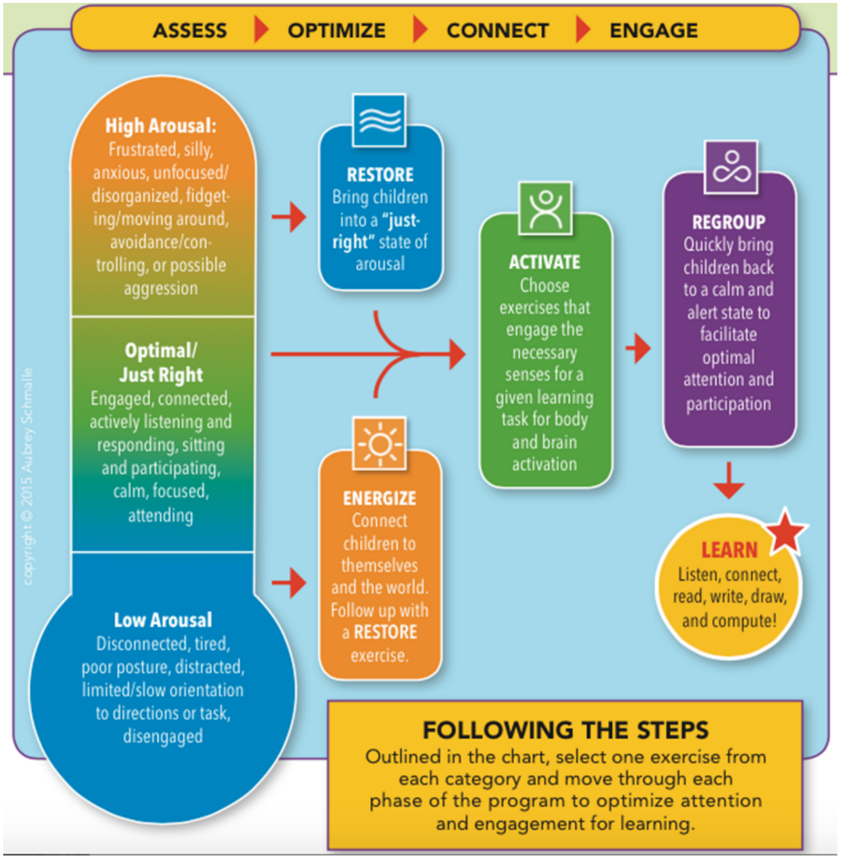
Simple Solutions: Digitally Mindful Movement

Digitally mindful movement incorporates exercises to reduce stress and increase production of BDNF in the brain for making new connections. It is sensory-based and goal-directed while also promoting recovery from screen time demands. All it takes is 2-3 minutes!



Check out the Body Activated Learning Playlist on the Sensational Achievements YouTube Channel to learn more about Energizing, Restoring, Activating, and Regrouping Movement

Visit bodyactivatedlearning.com to grab your resources

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ACTION STEPS FOR PARENTS

BE PRESENT

Technological interruptions are associated with child problem behaviors. Children need your guidance and modeling to learn how to manage technology to be creators, not just consumers.

MAKE A FAMILY PLAN FOR MEDIA AND SCREEN USE

Visit healthychildren.org and Search: Family Media Plan

CREATE WHITE SPACE

Set up screen free zones and times in your home.

MOVE WITH A PURPOSE

Engage in sports, backyard games, and indoor obstacle courses.

Check out the Shop at bodyactivatedlearning.com for more resources

MAKE PLANS FOR WEEKLY DIGITAL DETOX

Reduce stimulation. Go on nature hikes, outings in quiet spaces, do art projects, do yoga/meditation. Turn on focus mode on your phones and accomplish a goal as a family.

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ACTION STEPS FOR EDUCATORS

1) REDUCE SCREEN TIME FOR WIGGLE BREAKS

Up-level Brain Breaks with Body Activated Learning to prime the senses for learning through proactive and purposeful movement

2) USE VISION BREAKS PAIRED WITH VISUALIZATION DAILY

Have kids cup their eyes and "see themselves doing something well" or executing an instruction to build goal-directed behavior.

3) PLAN FOR TECH FREE LEARNING TIMES

Turn off the Smartboard, Chromebooks, and iPads and add in more kinesthetic learning activities

4) PROVIDE ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES TO SCREENS

In down time, indoor recess, and quiet lunch, offer games, fidgets, and puzzles on paper

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TAKING ACTION IN THE COMMUNITY

1) ADD DIGITALLY MINDFUL MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES TO COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Before and After-school programs are a great place to add Body Activated Learning activity stations and educate on screen health

2) SPONSOR DIGITAL DETOX EVENTS

Set up events at local Parks and outdoor venues. Educate the community on ways to balance screen time and movement

3) CREATE DEVICE FREE ZONES

During group activities and community initiatives, encourage connection and collaboration without phones and screens

4) MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

Start asking kids and teens questions about screen time, social media and video game play. Establish a child's digital profile as part of a total support plan

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**Note: The information contained in this guide is not a substitute for professional support if your child is struggling with screen addiction, mental health issues, learning, or medical issues. This guide is meant to inform and inspire change in our communities to better support the leaders of tomorrow.*

Next Steps

Take Action! Whether you are a parent, an educator, or someone in the community that works with children, you can make a difference. Technology is a part of life but children need your guidance to learn how to navigate the balance between technology and life experiences that lead to health and happiness!

Subscribe to Aubrey Schmalle on YouTube to get notified of more trainings and resources or visit aubreyschmalle.com to connect to a wide variety of resources.

Send an email to admin@sensational-achievements.com if you would like to schedule Aubrey Schmalle OTR/L for a webinar, staff training, or speaking engagement.

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