

## Parents of Young Children: Put Down Your Smartphones

### Too much tech and too little talk could delay communication development.

Parents today are more pressed for time than any other generation of parents—and constantly connected. Largely thanks to the smartphone, parents often find it difficult to separate from their hand-held devices. Checking your phone has become both habit and necessity to manage work and family life. But, all this multitasking could also hurt your young child's ability to learn.

### Ways to Enhance Your Child's Communication Skills

1. **Play Non-Electronic Games:** Nursery rhymes such as peekaboo, pat-a-cake, and Itsy Bitsy Spider actually serve an important purpose: they promote face-to-face interaction, teach turn-taking, and reinforce essential parts of bonding and conversation. Activities like blowing kisses, waving bye-bye, and clapping all help a child build social interaction and conversation skills. These games all require free hands—for both children and parents!
2. **Share a Common Focus:** Read a book together, share a toy, look at the same dog in a park. When two people focus on the same thing at the same time, they are engaging in what is called "joint attention." Joint attention is a vital part of communication and language development. It is also an important social skill, allowing a child to share an experience with another person and see someone else's point of view. Sharing focus lets a child know you are interested in what they say or do. When parents are on their cell phones, they are not fully focused on the same points of attention as their child and miss key opportunities to build this skill.
3. **Send and Receive Nonverbal Messages:** Speaking and understanding words are just part of the communication puzzle. Non-verbal signals such as eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and body language provide additional information. A child is able to recognize emotions and understand the intent of a message. When a parent is using a smartphone, these nonverbal cues are often reduced or eliminated completely. As a result, children miss out on receiving important nonverbal signals from their parents (part of learning to communicate). Parents may also miss information their kids are trying to send them through pointing, gesturing, staring, etc. These are subtle, but vital signals young children send—especially when they don't speak many words yet. Excerpts taken from: <https://www.healthychildren.org>



# How Media Use Affects Your Child

Most kids today are plugged into devices like TVs, tablets, and smartphones well before they can even ride a bike.

Technology can be part of a healthy childhood, as long as this privilege isn't abused. For example, preschoolers can get help learning the alphabet on public television, grade schoolers can play educational apps and games, and teens can do research on the Internet.

But too much screen time can be a bad thing:

- Children who consistently spend more than 4 hours per day watching TV are more likely to be overweight.
- Kids who view violent acts on TV are more likely to show aggressive behavior, and to fear that the world is scary and that something bad will happen to them.
- Teens who play violent video games and apps are more likely to be aggressive.
- Characters on TV and in video games often depict risky behaviors, such as smoking and drinking, and also reinforce gender-role and racial stereotypes.

That's why it's so important for parents to keep tabs on their kids' screen time and set limits to ensure they're not spending too much time in front of a screen.

## What's Recommended?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends these guidelines for screen time:

- **Babies and toddlers up to 18 months old:** No screen time, with the exception of video-chatting with family and friends.
- **Toddlers 18 months to 24 months:** Some screen time with a parent or caregiver.
- **Preschoolers:** No more than 1 hour a day of educational programming, together with a parent or other caregiver who can help them understand what they're seeing.
- **Kids and teens 5 to 18 years:** Parents should place consistent limits on screen time, which includes TV, social media, and video games. Media should not take the place of getting enough sleep and being physically active.

Excerpts taken from: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/tv-affects-child.html>



# Parenting Showdown: Why Don't We Just Stand United

By Stacy DeBroff

When parents disagree over even minor parenting issues: the repercussions echo throughout the whole next day and the whole family. For instance, if Dad lets the kids stay up way past bedtime, you have Mom at home with an entire day of dealing with a grumpy, tired, unhappy kid or one who resents your more stringent rules. Or it's the working Moms who get reports from a babysitter, the preschool, the teachers, and the after-school about a tired child who is acting out. As parents, we must rely on having a united front.

Yet what happens amidst this child-focused lifestyle where both parents feel highly vested in their children's success is often a clash about parenting this precious commodity. With both Mom and Dad holding strong opinions about discipline, nutrition and diet, and safety (the most common areas of conflict), parental disagreements abound: contributing dramatically to our country's nearly 50% divorce rate.

Who wants to discipline, admonish or oppress their self-proclaimed "best friend" and center of our universe? And thus, parenting disagreements of how to handle everything from bad behavior to bad grades emerges. Not to mention both parents ducking from being the perceived "bad guy." And while all parents disagree over parenting issues, if parenting styles continually clash or fall into extreme conflicts, marriages along with children's healthy development fall by the wayside. Thus even highly compatible couples can find themselves at a crossroads when it comes to parenting beliefs, styles, or techniques in direct conflict with each other.

So, what do you do? Here are some tips to keep different ideas from becoming arguments

**Don't Play Good Cop - Bad Cop** - Kids need to know that both parents mean business – both discipline and are consistent with each other.

**Fight the Battles That Matter to You the Most** - Pick a few non-negotiable points: Each parent gets a list of 5 non-negotiable points that you agree to respect for each other.

**Know That Parenting Style Disagreements Bound To Happen** - Disagreeing about discipline, or other parenting issues, is something we all experience along the way, no matter how much we see eye-to-eye on most things.

**Recognize How Parental Fighting Affects Children** - When faced with an unexpected situation, don't argue with your spouse/partner about what to do in front of your child. If you see an argument with each other brewing, have your child sit in their room and wait for you to come talk to them about the situation.

**Be Respectful of Your Partner's Views** - You may think your partner's suggestion is ridiculous, but he or she probably has a good reason to back it up. Be respectful and listen rather than getting angry and immediately assuming that you're right. Discuss options you both can buy into before making a decision.

**Hold Your Tongue** - If your five-year old son kicks his sister and your husband loses his temper and sends him crying to his room, it's probably not a good idea to follow after your son and let him free. Let the punishment stand instead of sending a mixed signal, but have a talk with your spouse/partner later and let him know when you want to make a decision together.

**Keep the Focus on Your Child** - Sometimes the type of punishment that one parent favors simply won't work for your child. When disagreeing about discipline, make sure you're first and foremost considering what will work best for your child.

**Compromise** - If you can't agree on standard rule for everything, be willing to compromise once in a while. Take your husband's suggestion on an issue you don't feel as strongly about in return for him taking your suggestion next time. Just like everything else in a marriage, talking and compromising is key.

**Form a United Front** - Even when it took you and your spouse/partner two hours to agree on a strategy, don't let your child know. If they see that you are both on the same page, they won't try to play you off each other, as children often do with parents.

**Plan Ahead** - Sit down with your spouse/partner and agree on some of the more basic or important disciplinary issues. Discuss with your partner about how you both respond to your child's meltdowns or misbehavior, and make sure you both hold your child to similar rules and use complementary styles of discipline.

**Look at Discipline as a Process** - Families learn and grow as they go. If you find something doesn't work for you, change it next time. Don't be afraid to reevaluate your approaches.

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**IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR WEST VIRGINIA**  
**FAMILY HEALTH MEMBERS**

**West Virginia Family Health has provided Medicaid coverage to West Virginians for the past five years by renewing annual contracts managed by the State. The current contract expires on June 30, 2019. After careful consideration, West Virginia Family Health has decided to not renew its contract for another year.**

**As a result, West Virginia Family Health members will receive letters explaining the process the State will use to transition our members to other Medicaid plans prior to June 30, 2019.**

**West Virginia Medicaid members currently enrolled in WVFH may call 1-800-449-8466 or visit <https://www.mountainhealthtrust.com/> to enroll in another plan prior to June 30, 2019.**



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