

# **Reclaiming Humanity:**

## **Recommendations Regarding Managing Technology Use**

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Note: The recommendations below are by no means prescriptive or exhaustive. They are simply a collection of suggestions that have been shown to be helpful in better managing one's technology use and working with children to do the same. Given that this document is designed for a varied audience with different levels of technology exposure and use, I will not be giving any recommendations for specific age ranges or amounts/limits of technology use. These are generic recommendations and are not meant to address any significant concerns or issues. If you are unsure if something you are dealing with requires assistance beyond these generic ideas, please make sure to contact an appropriate professional or organization to assist you.

Healthy growth is typically gradual and achieved step by step. I recommend taking on small resolutions (kabbalos) that have a very high likelihood of success. Do them in ways that do not require ongoing inspiration. Rather, try to make them something habitual. Utilize technology and/or others to help you maintain your resolution (e.g., by having it automatically shut off, setting reminders, working jointly on projects, etc.).

Below are some suggestions. Try to identify and select just a couple that you think would be most helpful and have a very high likelihood of success.

To begin properly, you have to identify and acknowledge where you and those around you currently are (Makir es mekomo). Make sure you are aware of others outside yourself and your child that may have an impact on your/their technology use and exposure e.g., your broader family, other children, community members, etc.

Do a real assessment of where you are. Try to be as vulnerable, honest, and realistic with yourself as you can be. Check your own and your family members screen time use. Get realistic feedback on your use from family members and confidants.

Openly, honestly, and vulnerably talk to your Rav about technology use for you and your family.

Always remember that with the right approach, guidance, choices, and siyata dishmaya, you and your family can reclaim your humanity and live an amazing, healthy, productive, meaningful, and Torah-based life!

### **General Recommendations:**

- Take ownership of what you can and attempt to grow in a stepwise fashion, level by level. For example, if you have tech in the bedroom, at shul, dinner, family time, etc. reduce it with a structured plan and something that is relatively easier for you to habituate to.

- As Dr. Jordan B. Peterson says “Aim lower. Aim at something you will in fact do. Do it. Then, having succeeded, aim a bit higher.”
- Take on certain kabbalos or challenges. Dr. Eli Shapiro has some examples e.g., shutting down for shul, shutting down for shut eye, and going dark for dinner.
- Ensure each and every device is properly filtered, including those you think are “dumb,” gaming devices, music players, e-readers, etc.
- Improve your modeling of proper technology use to your children. Remember that children are much more impacted by what we do than what we say.
- Additionally, how we say things is much more important than what we say.
- In general, be aware that the further away the device is, the less distraction and stress you will have related to it.
- At minimum, ensure that devices are away during meals and play times and keep them out of the room, or at least put them face down and out of eyesight. Also ensure that they do not ring or vibrate to draw your attention during those times e.g., put your smartphone on “do not disturb.”
- Try to increase the amount of face-to-face time with loved ones.
- Make sure to make eye contact when communicating in person.
- Create family/mealtime rituals, e.g. tell me something bad, medium, and good that happened today, family game time, sharing divrei Torah at the Shabbos meal.
- Examine and try to minimize tech use that is just wasteful or not in line with your ultimate goals and values.
- Delete apps and things that waste time or bring you to places you do not want to be or do not align with your life’s values.
- Limit the number of times you recheck or refresh the same sites or feeds daily.
- If they are not absolutely needed, delete all social media accounts.
- Turn off notifications from as many places as possible.
- “Flow” is an incredibly important state, and it is easily disrupted. Once disrupted it takes about 20 minutes to get back into it. Therefore, frequent distractions prevent one from getting into or maintaining a flow state.
- Consider an image blocker (allow images only on necessary sites).
- Change screen settings to grayscale (to diminish the allure and pull of the device).
- Remove “recommendations” from as many sources as possible.
- Turn off autoplay whenever you can.
- Be aware of advertising, feeds, recommendations, etc. and how they influence our exposure and choices.
- Do not choose the videos recommended to you by sites e.g., YouTube.
- “Fact check” all information you get from the internet.
- Try specifically to seek out different points of view. Pursue evidence for the opposite point of view of what you think and hear and then carefully weigh the evidence.
- Turn off screens, and if possible, remove devices from bedrooms at least 60 minutes before bedtime. (Use a regular alarm clock.)
- If you must have the device in the room, do not sleep with a device within reach.
- Consciously, carve out small moments without distraction. Setup daily times for focused attention, mindfulness, meditation, etc.
- Remember that if you are not paying for the product, then you are the product. Or as Jaron Lanier profoundly said, “it’s the gradual, slight, imperceptible change in your own behavior and

perception that is the product... That's the only thing there is for them to make money from. Changing what you do, how you think, who you are."

- We are losing our humanity e.g., our daas, perception, reality, bechira, etc. to these technologies.

#### Regarding Children:

- "We are overprotecting our children in the real world while underprotecting them online." Says Jonathan Haidt, author of "The Anxious Generation" and co-author of "The Coddling of the American Mind."
- Adjust your children's schedule and structure so that they have more time for "free play" and are navigating their world in an age appropriate and face-to-face manner.
- Remember that technology is a privilege, not a right.
- Be mindful of "working with" rather than "doing to" children. Ultimately, you need to have a working relationship with your children and cannot simply rely on control.
- Remember the saying: "Rules without relationships equals rebellion."
- Children feeling restricted and/or different than their peers/society is dangerous. Sometimes trying to be too sheltered, strict, yeshivish, chassidish, etc. can backfire and create additional risks.
- Be cognizant of the realities. You cannot control technology by force. The internet is everywhere, and internet-enabled devices are ubiquitous, relatively cheap, and easy to hide.
- Some exposure to information, concepts, and imagery that go against your values and are inappropriate is virtually unavoidable.
- That being said, it is incumbent upon parents to do whatever they can to safeguard and protect children from the dangers of technology in a balanced fashion.

#### Safeguards:

- Delay getting children a device with internet access as long as possible.
- Rally together with other parents and your yeshivos to set a policy that prohibits children in elementary school from having their own internet-enabled devices.
- Ensure that at minimum your children's elementary schools are completely phone-free throughout the school day. Ensure that high schools have carefully developed technology policies.
- Abide by the rules of the mosdos and encourage others to do so as well. Going against the rules of the mosdos you send your children to is terrible chinuch and will likely have very problematic effects for your children and others.
- Make very thoughtful decisions around all areas of screen time use e.g., the amount of time, content, means of access, when and where it can be used, etc.
- Avoid using screens as pacifiers, babysitters, to stop tantrums, or to address boredom.
- Do not fall prey to the "but everyone has one" argument. Be smart and judicious in your chinuch.
- If/when you will be allowing your children to utilize internet-enabled technology, you should think deeply about some of the following ideas and suggestions. Remember that having technology around means that it is almost inevitable that children will access it and, in many cases, will use it to attempt to find something that is against your rules and value system.
- Be mindful that a child using a device to have a regular or video-call with a relative, look at pictures or videos, do schoolwork, send an email, look for something on Amazon, etc. are all instances of utilizing internet-enabled technology. Therefore, parents need vigilance and children need education even for the most basic technology usage that you may allow.

### Filtering/Parental Controls:

- There will have to be sacrifices for things to be more secure, safe, and healthy for you and those around you. For example, when using filters, you will encounter more annoyances, blocked access, slower response times, etc.
- Ensure proper filtering, parental controls, monitoring, etc. on every single device your children can possibly come in contact with (whether they are old, broken, you think they're unused, etc.).
- In addition to device-level filtration and monitoring, ensure that you also have such safety measures in place on the Wi-Fi/network level too.
- Use parental/screen time controls on both the Wi-Fi and device levels to limit and turn off the internet and devices at appropriate times.
- If your children will have exposure to electronics, express rules, expectations, rewards, and consequences around technology use as clearly and consistently as possible.
- Build rules, regulations, and communication into this arena from the beginning.
- Create technology contracts with family members laying out expectations, and rules. Build in rewards for adherence and consequences for rule violations.
- Note that filtering alone is far from a complete solution to today's technology issues. As I elaborate on in my book "From Boys to Men: Guiding our sons and students in the ways of kedushah (FBM), filters are very helpful in ensuring that a child does not inadvertently stumble across inappropriate material. With a filter, a child who is not set on finding such materials will have difficulty doing so, and a child who is trying to avoid such stimuli will have an easier time of it.
- However, many parents wrongfully assume that since they have filtered all their devices, they do not need to educate their children about healthy technology use, puberty, sexuality, etc. Filters are an important component but ongoing, developmentally appropriate, education is also crucial.
- Parents need to know that "The data regarding exposure clearly demonstrates that children are likely to be exposed to inappropriate material, even if their own homes are not a potential source. Moreover, given the ubiquity of inappropriate content that exists today, any child that seeks out such material will easily be able to find it by bypassing the filter, getting an unfiltered device, receiving such content from a friend, etc. Even without seeking out inappropriate stimuli, during normal life, boys will inevitably be exposed to both tzanua and not tzanua girls and women...." (FBM p.66)
- Our children need intensive chinuch to properly face and overcome the challenges that their development, the society we live in, and technology present.

### Education:

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) developed the 5 C's mnemonic to help aid discussions about technology. The 5 C's of media use are based on the **child**, the **content**, ways to **calm** down, what media is **crowding out**, and ongoing **communication**.
- Teach children how to use whatever technology they do use properly and avoid pitfalls. Increase your education and communication with them around these matters in an age and developmentally appropriate fashion. Be mindful of what they are likely to encounter from other children, interactions they have, and their experiences in the world.
- Preemptively educate and inoculate them to the best of your ability.
- Create maximal safety, trust, and openness in your relationship with kids to foster conversations with them about everything and for them to bring their questions, concerns, or challenges to you.

- Kids need to understand that like a car, technology can be extremely helpful, powerful, and utilized for great things. Simultaneously, if used improperly, it is also extremely dangerous and damaging.
- Utilize a curriculum specifically designed for healthy technology use e.g., Dr. Eli Shapiro's digital citizenship program. (Curriculums containing school, parent, and child components are the best.)
- Teach children about online privacy, safety, boundaries, etc. For example, children need to know that there is nothing private online and everything online lives forever.
- Children should have something that is safe and free from prying eyes e.g., a personal diary.
- Teach children about the risks of peer pressure, cyberbullying, victimizing, self-comparison, manipulation, boundary violations, inappropriate exposure, etc.
- Do not just inculcate fear. Try to instill a sense of dignity and mastery to the children and help them feel like they can utilize and harness the power of technology properly.
- Provide assertiveness training, bullying prevention, and other skills to fortify children to be able to properly handle the online world.
- Children need to learn to question, doubt, and verify all forms of information they receive.
- Teach about various forms of scams, phishing, viruses, etc.
- Teach children about online disinhibition which applies when they think they are anonymous, and also when they are identifiable but are not "in-person."
- Teach children to never respond to stimuli when they are in heightened emotional states, particularly negative ones. Help children learn to give themselves time to think, process, calm down, and check with someone else before responding. For example, do not send a response to something emotionally charged for at least 12 hours and after checking in with someone else.
- Communicate about what children are seeing. Point out good behavior, such as cooperation, friendship, and concern for others. Make connections to meaningful events or places of interest. (AACAP). Highlight positive uses rather than focusing on negative ones.
- Foster a dialogue with children about health and proper technology-based behaviors and influences and unhealthy and improper ones.
- Provide pre-puberty and inyanei kedusha education. Such education should include education about sexuality, puberty, health, appropriate boundaries, safety, ongoing challenges, etc.
- Educate regarding what they see in public in general, and specifically to consider whether what is portrayed online is fake, digitally altered, or the best curated depictions that can be found. (The same goes for other things we bring into home including Jewish magazines.)
- Children should learn to check in with themselves and assess if they feel better or worse after their technology use.

#### Utilizing Technology:

- Gradually ease into technology – e.g., the right kind of games are often better than videos.
- Utilize screen time and parental control technology to have automatic limits and shutoffs in place. Typically, the less ongoing "negotiations" there are the better off everyone is.
- To avoid confrontations or issues around access, time limits, shut offs, etc. discuss these limitations in advance of your child receiving or using any technology.
- If you provide a child with access to internet-enabled devices it is often best to begin with very limited and safe options. (For example, begin with a "kosher" device or an Apple device without a browser or app access and slowly graduate. If you allow a browser, you can use "whitelist" filtering and built-in parental controls. For example, you can set an Apple devices browser to whitelist and utilize the built-in screen time and shut offs in the parental control settings.)
- Regarding utilizing devices, the larger, less portable, and less invasive the device the better.

- There are now many “kosher” phones and devices that are specifically designed with limited features and accessibility. However, every device is different so look carefully into them.
- In the beginning, adapt “hilchos yichud” for children being with an internet enabled device.
- As children grow, mature, and demonstrate proper responsibility, gradually add features, access, and independence within proper limits.
- Do not allow children to install/uninstall or purchase apps or anything else on their own.
- Children should not be able to download or buy things themselves. Block the app store and in app purchases on their devices.
- Familiarize yourself with both the devices and specific inputs such as apps, programming, etc. your child may access to ensure it is age and values appropriate.
- Check carefully into all programming. Even things labeled for young children are often portraying actions and values that are antithetical to the Torah.
- Technology changes rapidly so you need to keep your knowledge current and up-to-date.
- Work with organizations that are knowledgeable about technology and safety to help you.
- Double check the organization’s work and their technology rather than solely relying on them.
- Also ensure that the people working with you/your child regarding technology maintain proper parental and child consents, boundaries, and professionalism, and are working within generally accepted child safety and protection guidelines.
- Monitor and occasionally check that all safety measures are in place and working properly.
- Parents must be vigilant about device, Wi-Fi, filter, parental control, and screen time passwords and other potential security lapses.
- Test the safety and security of the measures you have in place. For example, search for terms a curious child would attempt to search e.g., hug, kiss, and more explicit mature and inappropriate terms on your browser, Amazon app, all social media e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and all other searchable browsers or apps.
- Ensure the safety and limitation of access on all devices that enter your home including those of your babysitter, housekeeper, etc.
- Have clearly established rules with staff in your home as well as your children regarding the use of staff members’ devices.
- Even if you allow screen time, avoid it for an hour before bedtime.
- Do not allow technology to predominate play dates or social interactions, especially during the elementary school years. (If you allow any technology use during playdates e.g., playing video games together, make sure it is appropriate and limited.)
- Do not just assume that a device termed “dumb” cannot access the internet. Many such devices e.g., “dumb phones” have browsers that are difficult to filter. Be cognizant of the other dangers involved too, including who they are communicating with, what content and images are shared, how often and when they are being used, etc.
- Beware of the kinds of communication and relationships that can be formed on all platforms, including gaming systems.
- Even when children become teenagers do not allow them to have or go on social media.
- Do not allow children to publicly give out private information or their location.
- Any picture or video a child wants to share should require parental approval.
- Work on decreasing the immediacy and impulsivity that modern technology exacerbates. Try to work on slowing down and being more mindful and thoughtful. For example, institute a 24-hour waiting time before getting what you desire, or what your child asks for.

- When in doubt or in need of assistance, be sure to reach out to professionals and organizations that can help you.
- You are not alone in this and there are many resources available. Below are just a few additional resources to assist you.

#### Additional Resources:

- Dr. Shloimie Zimmerman's clinical practice, and website which contains an abundance of information including speeches, podcasts, etc. Web: <https://caapsgroup.com/>
- Dr. Shloimie Zimmerman's book: <https://caapsgroup.com/dr-zimmermans-book-from-boys-to-men/>
- Dr. Eli Shapiro's Digital Citizenship program. Web: <https://www.thedigitalcitizenship.com/>
- TAG - Technology Awareness Group. Web: <https://tag.org/>
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Web: <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/>
- The AAP parenting website: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/default.aspx>
  - Healthychildren.org has a tool to help create a family media plan available at: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/fmp/Pages/MediaPlan.aspx>
- The American Psychological Association (APA): <https://www.apa.org/topics/social-media-internet>
- Common Sense media has many resources to help parents with technology use. Web: <https://www.commonsense.org/>
- The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP): [https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_Youth/Resource\\_Centers/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Resource\\_Centers/Screen\\_Media\\_Resource\\_Center/Home.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_Youth/Resource_Centers/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Screen_Media_Resource_Center/Home.aspx)
- Boston Children's Digital Wellness Lab. Web: <https://digitalwellnesslab.org/>
- The website related to Jonathan Haidt's book and resources: <https://www.anxiousgeneration.com/>
- A website related to a powerful documentary and resources: <https://www.thesocialdilemma.com/>
- Project focus – an organization promoting healthy tech use: <https://theprojectfocus.org/>
- Vayimaen - An organization to help with shemiras einyaim challenges: <https://www.vayimaen.org/>
- Guard Your Eyes - An organization helping those struggling with inappropriate internet use: <https://guardyoureyes.com/>