SLOW TECH PARENTING GUIDE by Patti Connolly

Slow Tech Parents...
• Understand that children develop the thinking and social-emotional skills needed for engaging in digital technology very slowly.
• Know that it takes years to model and teach their child these needed skills so that he/she will become an ethical, balanced, creative digital citizen.
• Have different expectations of how each of their children will engage with tech devices.
• Are lovingly firm about their values concerning tech use.
• Know that when their child initiates a connection with them they need to respond with full attention. For example, they strictly limit their smartphone use for communication when they are with their child.
• Learn the difference between passive consumption of media (TV, DVDs, etc.) and participatory media – especially interactive apps and games.
• Are engaged in participatory media with their child. “It’s a great opportunity for what we call ‘joint attention’, or the interactions between a child and a [parent], the back-and-forth, which is critical not just to language development, but brain development.” (Christakis, 2014)
• Say "tell me" instead of "show me". It’s so easy to quickly pull up a definition, video, etc. Instead they encourage their kids to let a thought or question incubate.
• Keep aware of what’s out there in the virtual world – the latest trends, safety issues, etc.

Slow Tech Parents Create Boundaries
• Designate "Device-Free Times" for everyone in the family – mealtimes, bedtimes, family outings and visits to grandparents. For sleep to be restful they shut down all devices one hour before bedtime.
• Ban handheld devices in all bedrooms.
• Have the family computer in the busiest room in the house and place the charging station for all devices in one central location.
• Watch only one device at a time together when they are viewing. All eyes on one screen!
• Create clear boundaries for their children on how to use technology based on age, academic need, and type of devices (see “Media Diet” below and iRules at http://www.janelburleyhofmann.com

Slow Tech Child’s Digital “Media Diet”
0-2 years
Your child needs:
• To explore, learn to trust, and engage in “joint attention” with you.
• No passive screen time – TV, DVDs, tablets, smartphone viewing.
• Her parent(s) to put away computers and tablets when with her.

3-6 years
Your child needs:
• Uninterrupted time engaged in unstructured old-fashioned play (dress up, active outside play, creative, rough and tumble), playing with toys that require a “stick-to-it kind of attention”, exploring nature, listening to you read and tell stories.
• Strict limits on her passive screen time of educational programs – either none or with you co-viewing on Friday night-Saturday night, maximum viewing time = 1 hour total.
• An introduction to how to participate with tech devices in a very limited, positive way by engaging in these activities with your child, such as: Face Time or Skype with grandparents or extended family and child dictates an email to grandparents as she sits next you and the computer.

7-9 years
Your child needs:
• Uninterrupted time to play with other children and with open-ended, creative toys, to be actively engaged in real life experiences, to read and be read to, to pursue hobbies, to explore nature.
• Your firm guidance on how to move through boredom without engaging in screen time.
• Limited passive screen time with you co-viewing Friday night-Saturday night, maximum viewing time = 1 hour total.
• Time with you co-participating with media through tech devices for no more than 15 minutes a day total, such as: emailing grandparents with you typing for child, co-creating media (videos, music, etc.), co-viewing media that help the child learn how to make something new, sing a new song, etc., use interactive educational apps with your child, playing creative, interactive, non-violent video games together.

10-12 years
Your child needs:
• Uninterrupted time to play with others with open-ended, creative play materials, to be actively engaged in real life experiences, to read, to pursue hobbies, to explore nature.
• Your firm guidance on how to move through boredom without engaging in screen time.
• Limited passive screen time with you co-viewing Friday night-Saturday night.
• Time with you co-participating with media with you (see above for 6-9 year olds) and adding the following: researching a question child has online with parent, beginning to learn how to keyboard and how to program, setting up an email account that you monitor and control the password for.
• Limited time participating with media through tech devices (maximum 30 min/day total), such as: reading e-books, writing family and friends occasional emails, playing creative, interactive, non-violent video games

13-14 years
Your child needs:
• Time to engage in nature in new, challenging ways (rock climbing, mountain biking, etc.), to pursue hands on interests/hobbies, and to spend time being with friends in active, “real life” experiences.
• Your firm guidance on how to move through boredom without engaging in screen time.
• Limited passive screen time on weekends only.
• Daily opportunities using tech devices so as to become an ethical, responsible user (no more than 1 hour/day), such as above suggestions and the following: creating media (videos, music, stories, etc.) with parent supervision, researching online for school or for own interests with parent support, completing homework on computer in common area of house, watching media that helps her learn how to make something new, possibly having own cell phone to communicate with others.
• Clear agreements with you about tech use tailored to her age. It’s more about how she uses technology instead of how much she uses it.
• Create code of conduct with your child. Here is one from Janell Burley Hofmann: “Don’t be mean, don’t lie, don’t embarrass other people, don’t pretend to be someone you’re not, don’t go places you’re not allowed to go. Don’t post pictures that Grandma wouldn’t love.”

Resources:
The Big Disconnect by Catherine Steiner-Adair
Slow Tech Parenting ideas at http://www.janellburleyhofmann.com
Christakis, Dimitri A. "Interactive media use at younger than the age of 2 years: time to rethink the American Academy of Pediatrics guideline?." JAMA pediatrics 168.5 (2014): 399-400.