



TIPS FOR PARENTS

What Is “Technoference” and Why Does It Matter?



What Is “Technoference”?

The word “technoference” combines the words technology and interference. This word was created to identify the interruption of family time by technology. It happens when electronic devices, usually cell phones, get in the way of our interactions with other people. When we could be having face-to-face time with family, we instead are looking at our screens. This happens all the time, and it interrupts our communication more than we realize.

Think of it this way: You call your family into the kitchen for dinner. You have your phone in hand, and instead of having a conversation, you keep scrolling on social media. Does this sound familiar? In this instance, you have experienced technoference!

The most common way that technoference affects our interactions is through cell phones. Scrolling through social media feeds, checking emails, and having text conversations can all draw our attention away from the people immediately around us. This is called “phubbing,” or phone snubbing.



Why Is It Important?

Research shows that more hours of screen time for parents can negatively affect children’s activity levels, their ability to handle emotions, and their attention spans. This is because technology can distract parents, causing them to miss important bonding time with children. In some cases, the distraction of technology can cause parents to ignore safety hazards for their children. For example, a playground study showed that 70 percent of parents spent about 17 minutes of a 20-minute playground outing watching their phones instead of their children. Think of all the play and bonding that could have happened in those 17 minutes! Missing out on these moments of connection and play can lead to long-term developmental impacts. However, learning how to avoid technoference when possible can lead to better outcomes for both children and parents.



Develop Habits to Avoid Technoference

Technoference is normal, and it can be difficult to avoid. Good, bad, urgent, and spam messages have the same alert noise on electronic devices, so the urge to pick up a screen and check for updates is a real stressor! However, here are some practical habits your family can use to reduce technoference. Try one or multiple to see what works best for your family.

Can This Wait?

If a notification shows up on a device, it can seem urgent or attention-grabbing. However, if you find yourself having to choose between attention to the device and attention to the person with you, it is a good idea to make a habit of asking yourself the question, “Can this wait?” You may be surprised at how often the answer is “yes!” Setting aside a text, phone call, or social media alert to instead give attention to your child, co-parent, or other family member can make a positive difference in your bond.

Shared Charging Station

Using a family charging station can help reduce the urge to use phones, laptops, and other devices before bed. It also has the added benefit of creating a place to store these devices so that they are not with you all the time, meaning you may not be tempted to use them as frequently. The goal is to create more face-to-face time with your family. Try plugging in your devices, then stepping away and finding non-technology alternatives to scrolling through a phone before bed, like playing cards or reading books together. Let your devices recharge while you “recharge” together with your family!

App Timers

Many smartphones have built-in screen time locks. That is, if you want to set the boundary for yourself that you will only use a social media app for an hour a day, you can go into the settings on your phone to create a timer for that app. Once you have reached your daily screen time limit, it will essentially lock you out of the app for the day. This feature allows for flexibility when setting limits for yourself, and it is something that you can easily do together with your children if they have smartphones. It is also helpful in keeping you accountable for those boundaries you decide to set for yourself.

Take an Hour “Off”

Another technique you can use to avoid screen time is a dedicated, scheduled hour away from all electronics. As mentioned with the shared charging station technique, stepping away from technological devices altogether is the best way to avoid technoference. Try to find a time in your daily calendar to take an hour where your devices are off or stored away. Taking this time “off” will allow you to really connect with those around you, whether it is a family member or friend. A dedicated hour away from screens can really help you to connect with your child and find new, creative ways to play!

Strategies for the Whole Family

If you are co-parenting with someone, it is important to be on the same page about your household rules for technology use. The strategies here are effective, but only if they are consistent. Additionally, the strategies you use to avoid technoference will be most effective if you use them along with your child. Your exact technology boundaries may differ from your child’s, and that is okay! However, the strategy itself should be the same for the whole family. Your child will watch what you do, so if you set a rule for the family that you do not always follow, it is less likely that they will want to follow that rule.



Resources

Many articles and blogs have covered the subject of technofence. For more information and advice, check out these pieces on technological disruption and communication!

[Technofence in Parenting: Is Your Mobile Device Distracting You from Your Child?](#)

[Is Technofence Damaging Your Relationships?](#)

[Technofence: How Technology Can Hurt Relationships](#)

[How Is Technofence Affecting Your Relationship with Your Child?](#)

Visit tips.extension.msstate.edu for additional parenting resources.

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