

Striking the balance

Our world is a whirlwind of constant activity. Our brain is constantly engaged, we might think that we use on-line to switch off by browsing social media or playing a game but we are still very much switched on. Due to this we find we need the constant interaction and lose the ability to totally switch off from everything around us, including our thoughts. We find it hard to totally relax as our brain is constantly going, needing that level of engagement which means there is never a let up.

Now if we as adults find it hard to stop and relax imagine how difficult this is for young people to achieve. It is important that whilst we set guidelines for our children to abide by with the on-line world, it is just as important to provide them with tools they can use to balance the on-line and off-line world.

Just sitting and doing nothing is very difficult so it is worth ensuring that we take time to practise this skill. To encourage your child to do this explain the benefits to them using their emotions rather than their brain as remember they use the emotional part not the rational part.

Providing opportunities to be able to stop and relax. How often do we take time for our brains to have a rest? An effective technique is to ask your self the following questions whilst you take 5 minutes;

What can you hear?

What can you see? (This can include what different colours are around you)

What can you smell?

What can you sense?

We are using our senses allowing us to focus on the present, allowing our brain rest and recharge.

Along with setting family guidelines/family gaming contract it is also important to think about ensuring that you are providing your child/ren with a balance. **Keep a healthy balance** between on-line time and off-line time. To ensure that your child has a healthy lifestyle think about;



Seeing friends and interacting with them in real life. Having actual playdates with planned activities instead of gaming to encourage social interaction.

Ensure that they **participate in activities** they are excited about, whether that is a sport, getting outside or playing a game. If you provide them with an alternative activity, make it sound fun otherwise your children will not buy into it.

Ensure they keep up with their **homework and schooling**. Do you ask them how school is? What have they been learning? Do you check their homework? Taking an interest in what they are doing will encourage them to get it done. Have them complete their homework before they start gaming.

Sleep - Are they getting enough sleep? Do they need a wind down period before bedtime. Ensuring that they have finished on-line at least 30 minutes before bed to allow their brain to wind down.

Build **positive relationships** with family members – meeting up with family, or encouraging family activities, it could be a bike ride together or having a day playing crazy golf, going to the beach. Something that all the family can do together is especially effective if they have younger siblings who they do play on-line with.

Encourage family time by introducing a no-phone zone where all phones and gadgets are put away whilst eating so that everyone can sit and talk over dinner, this can help young people to use their social and interaction skills.

Introduce one night a **gadget free night** as well as having a gadget free hour at the weekend and use this time to chat and play/do an activity together.

Take an interest in what they are doing. Spending time with your child **1 on 1** without the distraction of phones is really powerful.

Encourage exercise and sell the benefits of a healthy body and mind. On-line play can stimulate their mind and provide many skills but it is also important they get some exercise in and use exercise to help emotions or to switch off.

Remember if you talk the talk, you need to walk the walk. If you are setting rules, such as no phones at the dinner table that needs to be for everyone not just the children. Can you, as a family, manage to go without on-line gadgets for X amount of time over a weekend?!

For helpful tips on striking the balance see the online Activities section: Healthy Alternatives, Family Time Activities, Outside Activities and Family Contract templates.