



## **Parenting - Your Child and Technology**

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Often I hear parents state that they are frustrated because their children are always using their computers, game boxes or other technology instead of doing the things the parents feel they should be doing.

It's easy for children to get tied up in the mesmerizing effects of technology that is specifically designed to capture their attention. In fact, technology can be addictive!

As the parent you need to know and do specific things in order to protect your family and children from the lure of the technological world:

1. Computers are often needed for homework but the child likely isn't doing homework for six hours straight! I would be very cautious about stating that technology can be used as often and for as long as the child decides they want to be on it. (Oh, and don't believe for a second that your child is doing homework the whole time the Power button is on).

2. Using technology as a reward or at selected times is better than trying to take it away. If your child thinks that technology is there all the time, s/he will be upset when you remove it as punishment. Let your child earn 30 minute coupons for their chores and limit the number of coupons they can redeem each day. They will work eagerly to earn their computer time rather than just expect it while neglecting their chores.

3. Not everyone has an iPhone, Xbox, or laptop. Your child will not be the ONLY one who has to do without. Do not be manipulated emotionally into thinking that your child is disadvantaged because they say so.

4. Ignorance is not an acceptable cop out for you to be a negligent parent. Saying that you don't understand software or technology is not a good excuse! Take a course or better yet, sit with the child and have him/her show you what they are doing. You will learn and have a better idea of their activities.

5. Paying for technology is not love. I once met with a parent whose child was failing in school but he paid for the 2400 text messages she had sent that month. No wonder her grades were poor! Purchasing technology or buying plans for children is not necessary and may even prevent them from doing their school work. Consider very seriously if and how a piece of equipment or software will help your child before buying it.

6. Technology has risks. Do you know why your teen is in the bedroom with the door locked using a video camera and computer? Predators are skilled at communicating with children and you cannot be naïve about this. Keep all computers in common areas of the house where you can supervise adequately.

7. You can and should monitor your child's activities. When a child asks you "Don't you trust me?" the answer is "No". If they want to do things in secret, that is a hint that they are doing something that you likely wouldn't approve.

8. You need to have the control. There is software that can be programmed to shut down a computer at the time you request. "Nanny programs" prevent children from going to sites that are risky. Check out the postings that your child makes on Facebook and confront the

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child about things that concern you. It is not acceptable, for example for them to use inappropriate language or talk with people you don't know. Also, look at the date and time of the posts and you will soon realize if there is a breach of the rules you have set for computer usage. (Posts after midnight are never acceptable).

9. You set the example. Do you walk around with a cellphone at your ear? Can you enjoy silence or must there always be "noise" in the room? If you are out for dinner, do you text or answer calls while ignoring the others at your table? How many movies are you watching each week? If you kept track of your technology hours would you class yourself as a good example for your child?

10. There is life outside of technology. People need to talk to others face-to-face and not just through social media. Belonging to clubs, walking the dog, playing sports and doing chores are all important aspects of life. Do not let you or your child become so entrenched in technology that you miss out on enjoying other important activities.

I don't care how intelligent your child is or how much you love that child. As the parent, you are responsible to protect him or her. It is better to have a good plan for how and when technology will be used than to try to clean up the mess after your child is addicted, victimized or isolated.

If you don't know what is going on - find out. If you get opposition from the child - be concerned. If you are really wondering what to do consult with a psychologist who will help you to set up a plan that will help you in this area of parenting.