**Mental Health & Social Emotional Tip**

**~ Raising kids in a Digital Age ~**

**By Michael Vladeck**

**For those of you who missed our fabulous TJ TALKS series on April 6th presenter Mindfulness Family Counselor Michael Vladeck, we have included part of his message for your use.** Mindfulness counselor Michael Vladeck has presented to countless schools on raising more grounded, self-aware teens and creating stronger family connections in the midst of digital distractions.

Michael offers Podcasts, family sessions, and a series of resources, etc.

 Bring out love, understanding, and connection now

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***Raising Balanced Kids in a Digital Age:***

*Solutions & Strategies for helping kids find balance with phones, computers, TV’s, and gaming*

*...with peace rather than power struggles*

Remember, the most helpful thing you can do for your children is to raise them in a way that helps them develop emotional intelligence, critical thinking and an authentic sense of self-worth. This way, when confronted with risky choices, they will make better choices than they would otherwise, or learn more quickly from mistakes when they make them. Also, make the culture of your family be one of connection, trust and receptivity - if it is not, then get your family some support. And, as I mentioned in the talk, consider that privacy and the use of technology are not rights - rather, they are privileges that are earned.

 **The Fundamental Strategies**

Basic framework for strategies that creating balance with technology *with less power struggle*

**#1: Work on yourself**

**Parenting is less a strategy and more a way of being.** Become emotionally and mentally the healthiest person you can possibly become with this life of yours - go for it: as it will radically impact your parenting. It will impact the adults your children will become (which is especially more needed in this digital age). Do whatever it takes to heal, grow and evolve.

Get support in breaking out of old habits and blind spots and learn to create deeper connection with your own inner world and those of your children.

*Many of our recurring problems stem from lack of awareness about our own patterns. When we are unmindful of our patterns of excuses, fears, biases, and attachments, we tend to focus on externals. From that place of blindness, we blame others, bemoan life, and work furiously to change people and circumstances. Sadly, we neglect the urgent and abiding need to look within and work fervently to change our own patterns and perceptions.- Sheikh Jamal Rahman*

**#2: Walk the Talk**

**If you are not balanced with YOUR screen addictions and excessive use, don’t bother trying to support them in having balance with theirs.** Take full responsibility for yours, and address it.

Get support. You can even find some answers by looking for support online - Here are some examples:

Beating phone addiction

Adult internet addiction camp

ReStart Internet Addiction Recovery Program

Email/phone addiction

**#3. Become computer literate**

**Raising kids in the digital age requires you to educate yourself and what is out there.** There are many websites and videos that can teachyou about every single aspect of technology, it’s risks and creating healthyhabits.

**#4: Raise a Healthy Child**

**Do you know how to help them cultivate emotional intelligence, critical thinking, self-worth and authentic communication skills?**

Most parents are not that great at these things, specifically. Get support, join one of my parenting classes, read articles, books on parenting. All their choices come from this foundation.

**#5: Relationship before rules**

**Relying too heavily on methods of control will only create power struggles.** Creating understanding and connection is the foundationupon which all the strategies stand.

**#6: Start conservatively**

It’s easier to give them more slack as they earn it, then take it back once they’ve had it. This is the essential to avoiding excessive entitlement.

**#7: Privacy & Guidance: Avoid re-enacting “Lord of the flies”**

Kids need guidance, as they live in a world of intense and excessive pressures while not yet knowing who they are - creating opportunities to lose themselves greatly, or get stuck walking down dangerous paths. Privacy is not a right for minors, for specific reasons. Kids

need to earn certain kinds of privacy - this way you are not protecting them from life, but preparing them for it.

**#8: Track their levels of understanding**

**Help your children become aware of issues and the forces that influence their choices.**

Explore with them what they know about the various aspects of screen addiction, social profiles and connections, cyberbullying, sexting, reputation management, marketing, pornography, etc.

when you feel they are ready for such discussions - yet don’t wait too long.

**#9: Learn with them**

**You don’t need to be a master to explore these topics with them -learn by their side.**

Assure that they are educated by learning with them, through videos, articles, and regular dialogue. Your role in this will support their critical thinking and perspective. Pick a topic and google it. Search for videos or articles that you can watch or together - quality education or entertainment. Examples of topics and videos to watch with your kids are below. Bring out love, understanding, and connection now

**#10: Make a Family Use Contract**

**You’ll likely need to make some adjustments to these contracts so they work more specifically for you family.**

Here are some ideas:

From PureSight From MediaTechParenting

From Common Sense Media

From Psychology Today “Flipped Parenting” Article and example

**#11: Keep the computer in a common area**

Keep it where you can monitor their use to some degree. Avoid putting a computer in a child's bedroom.

**#12: Limit Multi-tasking opportunities**

Have devices with games and apps on a **SEPARATE device** than the one they do homework on.

**#13: Gather up all devices at night**

Charge them in your room

**#14: Set limits on time usage**

Have black out times, tech-free zones, and time-limits on usage (to the degree that you can hold them accountable)

**#15: Be in control of internet usage in your home**

You can control this through your router’s setting (through the website of you ISP - Internet Service Provider), or through OpenDNS or other parental controls listed below. \*\*\*Know that your child may be able to access internet through their phone line, using their phone as

a wifi hotspot (which you may be able to disable - search it), or using a neighbors open wifi. There are many parenting control methods you have access to.

**#16: Support authentic, in-person, tech-free connection time**

...with their friends, or new kids and groups. During “play dates” require time that is tech-free (collect or shut down their devices). Virtual relationships are not an adequate substitute for non-virtual ones.

**#17: Get them out in nature for *extended periods* of time!**

Do this *every single year*... as it will help them reconnect with who they *really* are, beyond the social image that they can confuse themselves with, and free of the distractions that divide them from their deeper experiences. It will reconnect them with who they are beyond who they are trying to be.

**Why nature?**

Nature is unique in the way it helps us experience ourselves in that we can’t project our issues as well onto the natural world - and this creates a more inward, accountable and reflective process. Nature also gives us feedback in a way that nothing else does - clear, blunt, indifferent and to the point: This supports a kind of learning process that fosters deeper self-reliance and self-resourcing. The reason I encourage extended periods of time in nature is because it takes about 4 days to unwind, and another few to drop in more deeply, and another few to recalibrate their nervous system to this more authentic and regulated place. I strongly believe most kids need at *minimum 2* *consecutive weeks, 2 times each year. (This strong belief of mine stems from running 4-week trips with teens for over decade. It really does work* *to create balance and self-connection like nothing else I’ve ever seen do).* For longer trips you may need to send them to organizations similar to Outward Bound, Woman’s Wilderness, National Outdoor Leadership School, or camps **that do not allow** phones or internet (many

actually still do).

**#18: Know the recommended Guidelines**

Though most parents don’t follow them at all, there is science behind these recommendations.

The above Technology Use Guidelines for children and youth were developed by Cris Rowan, pediatric occupational therapist and author of *Virtual Child*; Dr. Andrew Doan, neuroscientist and author of *Hooked on Games*; and Dr. Hilarie Cash, Director of reSTART Internet Addiction Recovery Program and author of *Video Games and Your Kids*, with contribution from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Canadian Pediatric Society in an effort to ensure sustainable futures for all children. From <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cris-rowan/10-reasons-whyhandheld-> devices-should-be-banned\_b\_4899218.html

***When introducing younger children to digital devices and media***

**#19: Establish the *privilege* of it / Safeguard against entitlement**

It’s not a right, but a privilege. Explore the difference with them.

**#20: Create a shared email account** (for younger children) **–**

This will allow you can monitor who is sending them messages.

**#21: Teach your child about the specific dangers of the internet -**

Discuss rules for your kids to follow to maintain the privilege:

- If it’s not OK to say or show or do offline, it’s not OK online

- Never reveal personal information (including address, phone number, school name or location.)

- It IS addictive for most, so establish that you will monitor that

- Be kind to those you communicate with

- Educate! Share with them age-appropriate educational videos (below)

**#22: Bookmark your child's favorite sites** (for younger children)

This will keep their use habits focused, create easy access, and limit the chance they’ll access inappropriate content.

**#23: Help their brains develop in a balanced way!**

Make sure you are not leaving it up to them and “life” that they’ll choose such things over excessive screen use.

**- Attention and Focus-cultivating activities**

- like reading, certain games, climbing, dancing, writing

- **Imagination and creativity-cultivating activities**

- Art, building things, unstructured time, story telling

- **Relational-development games**

- Where they interact non-virtually with others

- Board games, card games, play games (think about your childhood)

**- Unstructured play time**

- It’ll help them develop their brain in more well-balanced ways.

**\*\*\***Games like chess, projects like origami, experiences like cooking with you, repairing projects with you, listening to different kinds of music with you, and even exploring fun, educational magazines, books and even websites - these all have profound impacts on development.

**Mental Health and Social Emotional Tip** Compiled by Samanda Davis, LCSW, MSW and Natalie Koncz, Ed.S., NCSP