

Siblings and Screen Time

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Last night one of my good friends came over with his kids. We were visiting when he turned to my son and said, “Don’t take for granted your relationship with your sister.” I asked him where this heartfelt advice came from. He said something we were talking about reminded him of the time years ago he and his older brother had a falling out. “My brother told my parents something I didn’t want them to know,” he said. “I remember my brother getting real joy seeing me get in trouble. We haven’t been close since then.”

The siblings' theme came up again tonight when I listened to Terry Gross interview two brothers who have remained close over the years. The Duplass brothers talked about when one went to college and felt alone and unsettled, what really helped was when his younger brother would come and spend weekends at the college. Terry asked the brothers if people thought it was strange that this college guy was hanging out with his 14-year-old brother. They both said they never thought about what others might be thinking. The brothers started making films together in their mid-twenties and have been doing so for over 20 years. Wow, talk about a close relationship.

How does this relate to screen time? When going into homes and filming *Screenagers* I would often see siblings in parallel worlds for hours at a time, each in their personal screen silos. I remember when 12-year-old Chris, who is in the film, told me that “*The only time my sister talks to me is when she bangs on the bathroom door telling me to get out*”.

Chris and his sister told me about the funny dress up activities they used to do and family gatherings they would have, but how it has all gone away since he started wanting to play video games all the time and she was constantly interacting with her phone.

I didn’t have a brother or sister growing up—but boy did I want one. I have always been fascinated by sibling relationships and now in this time of the tech revolution, how screen time is impacting things. I know tech can enable sweet interactions, like when one of my kids sends a thoughtful text to the other—sometimes with a photo, sometimes with an inside joke. Siblings can love playing video games together, watching videos, and such.

But I also know that lots of times they are in their own screen worlds, not interacting together. For this Tech Talk Tuesday, I’d love to know how your children interact with their siblings. When does the presence of technology bring them together and/or pull them apart?

Here are some questions to help get your conversation started:

- Are your kids intentionally ensuring screen-free time together?
- How much is screen time replacing face-to-face time?

- How does screen time enhance sibling relationships?
- And how do we take a moment to show our appreciation to our siblings?

One last thing... we encourage you to print our TTTs and bring them to the table for discussion so that you don't have to use your computer or cell phone. If you are reading this from an email, look for the icon at the top, or bottom, of the page that will allow you to print it. If you are reading this on our website, there is a grey printer icon on the right-hand side of the page.