

Human development experts recommend tuning in to family, not devices

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Combined with increasingly hectic work, school and extracurricular schedules, the advent of wireless technology has led to less quality time between parents and children. University of Missouri human development specialists say powering down digital devices is a vital step in maintaining family relationships and health.

Kelly Warzinik, Extension associate in the College of Human Environmental Sciences, says that instead of watching TV or talking on a cellphone, parents can take advantage of daily opportunities to interact with their children at meal times or in the car. Additionally, she notes that while it is important for children to be involved in activities such as sports or music, parents should not overschedule themselves or their children to ensure that everyone has time to connect.

"Husbands and wives who are working and raising kids may need to be even more intentional about nurturing their relationship as a couple," Warzinik said. "Touch base throughout the day by calling, emailing or texting, and after children are asleep, put down the iPhone, turn off the television and just focus on each other."

In addition to strengthening family connections, turning off time-consuming devices leads to better health, according to Saralee Jamieson, human development specialist and Extension program director in St. Clair County. She says people who devote more time to digital technology are less likely to make [healthy food choices](#) or be physically active and are less successful academically.

"People who watch a lot of TV are exposed to thousands of ads for high-calorie, low-nutrient foods as well as violent programming," Jamieson said. "While it might not seem harmful, having a muted TV on while sleeping disrupts healthy [sleep patterns](#) and contributes to [chronic fatigue](#)."

Jamieson recommends these tips for parents to set a good example for children:

- Limit family members' recreational time with TV, video or computer screens to two hours daily.
- Remove TVs from bedrooms and learn to negotiate and take turns watching different shows.
- Turn the TV off and eat or socialize as family.
- Develop hobbies and become more involved in the community, neighborhood, local schools or places of worship.

Human development and family sciences research is conducted through MU Extension and the Department of [Human Development](#) and [Family Studies](#) in HES.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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