



The Upper School ParentNet meeting was held in the Farmhouse on November 7, 2017. We had a rich discussion on the following topics:

- ❖ Cell phones and screen time
- ❖ Driving independence
- ❖ Prom nights

## Cell phones and screen time

***Situation:** Kids have too much screen time, and are spending many hours on their cell phones as well. At the same time, some kids seem to be encouraged to stay on screen with “streaks”. What’s worse is that kids who don’t use their phones and apps (such as snapchat or popular video games) as much feel rejected/isolated/banned from their friends, and are almost compelled into participating.*

*What can be done about this?*

### **Discussion:**

**Restrict phone usage hours.** Set clear boundaries up front on the extent of phone usage you would allow after your child has come from school. For instance, one parent noted that they do not allow phones between 4pm and 6pm. Another parent noted that she established a routine for their child to have an evening shower, and then instructed to put their phones for charging in their (parent’s) room till the next day – this would ensure a good night’s sleep and not be distracted by constant text messages. Yet another parent suggested to earmark a day when there will be zero phone usage and screen time (Screen-free Sundays). One of the moms suggested using a language kids would understand (concussion protocol), and go completely screen free for a few days – it is hard in the beginning, but becomes much easier with time. Another suggestion was to try keeping kids busy with after school activities (playing sports, working at Jimmy John’s, etc) will also help reduce their screen time. Finally, one parent noted that downgrading their phones will reduce screen time as well.

**Spot check your child’s phone.** Reach an agreement with your child that you will spot check their phone at any time, inclusive of snap chat and other text messages. Some parents noted that doing so helped them get a pulse of what’s going on in their child’s world.

**Track screen time for your kids.** Use an app, such as Moment, to track total screen time your child has had for a day. Some parents noted that this helped in better understanding what reasonable screen usage time may be acceptable for their family.

**Educate yourself about your child’s development.** During the adolescence period, your child’s brain is undergoing rapid growth of nerve cells, and this is a time of great vulnerability. It is a time when several hormones and neuro-transmitters, such as dopamine, surge. Dopamine, the neurotransmitter most responsible for feelings of pleasure, has a powerful impact. The early adolescent brain, with its increased number of nerve cells, has higher levels of dopamine, but dopamine levels in the reward center of the



brain are changing throughout adolescence. These changes in the dopamine levels in the reward center suggest that the adolescent requires more excitement and stimulation to achieve the same level of pleasure as an adult. So the teenager will attempt riskier behaviors to achieve elation. Dopamine is also the neurotransmitter secreted when individuals participate in various addictive behaviors. Video games and other addictive apps re-inforce rewards, which induces further release of dopamine, and consequent pleasure. This is why kids seek such apps out, and then get addicted.

**Empower your children to understand their priorities.** Ask kids to determine what their longer term goals are, and educate them on how phones and excessive screen time impedes their progress. Talk to them about how their brains are super-wired to learn, and what the daily things are they need to be working on to reach their goals. Help them understand that they need to exhibit grit as they work through their activities, and not quit, knowing that there will be highs and lows. Let them know that there are many examples of kids who failed college due to addiction to their phones. Finally, make them aware that doctors are finding that many screen-addicted kids are getting “tech necks”, and short-sighted eye problems at the age of 20 that are more typical of 40 year olds.

**Lead by example.** One of the moms suggested to pick a difficult task (non-screen related!) for each member of the family, and then work through your tasks just as you ask your child to work through theirs. Your work ethic will inspire them, and automatically reduce screen time.

**Ask the school to help.** Kids generally listen to their teachers more so than they listen to their parents. If the school can help re-inforce some of the ideas brought up in the discussion above, it would have a greater impact on the child. Further, the school could also declare Fridays as a “no-tech-day”, with all homework needing to be written down as opposed to requiring a screen.

***Other resources:***

- Read the book -- [Reset Your Child's Brain](#)
- Read the book -- [Wise Minded Parenting](#)
- Watch the documentary – Screenagers

## Driving and Independence

***Situations:*** My child asked me if she could go get donuts. A couple of hours later, I noticed that she was at Voodoo donuts in Portland! Another mom noted that her kids don't have great road sense, and are completely dependent on a navigation app, which may not consider the current roadside conditions. An interesting situation one mom noted was that her child and another friend were intending to take the bus for dinner and then got invited by their friend, who said he would drive them elsewhere. How can the mom trust their friend's driving? Finally, a huge concern is whether her child would get distracted by their phone while driving.



*How can such challenges be addressed?*

**Discussion:**

**Put the phone away.** One of the moms noted that she simply asks her son to put his phone in the trunk of the car. Zero chance of distractions!

**Park the car and attend to the problem at hand.** While driving, there may be times when GPS asks you to make a U-turn in a high traffic area. Instead of attempting to do that challenging task, find a parking lot close by, and figure out what your next course of action should be. Similarly, if there is an important call to make or a distraction to attend to, park the car first and then call. One of the parents noted that she would do it herself to model the right behavior, and lead by example.

**Verbalize directions.** For kids who have challenges navigating basic routes without an app, teach them to verbalize all the directions ahead of time. This will help them get better at visualizing and get a better sense of direction.

**Have a list of drivers you consider safe.** Often times, kids have a quandary where older kids offer rides to younger ones after a softball game. At such a time, clearly instruct kids to only get rides from others who you consider safe and have expressly allowed.

**Help your child become a confident driver.** One mom noted that she had her daughter drive on a long straight road with no traffic lights and light traffic. Another mom had her son drive in a neighborhood with practice for parking, backing behind a corner, be more aware of surroundings, and so on. A key learning is that Driver's Ed does not necessarily give enough practice to the child to drive safely, even if it may be adequate to get a license. Finally, only allow a child to drive by themselves once you feel confident that they are ready to do so.

**Other resources:**

- [911 driving school](#)
- [Drivers Ed](#)
- [Life 360](#)

## Prom nights/dance nights

**Situation:** *During prom nights, only a certain set of girls get asked out by the boys, resulting in the rest of the girls feeling disappointed. How can this be addressed, and in general how do prom/dance nights work?*

**Discussion:**

**Encourage inclusion.** Parents should encourage their children to be inclusive, and mix both singles and couples in their groups.

**Consider it as a learning moment.** Help your child understand that it is just fine if they don't get a dance partner, and that they have an opportunity to make their own way.