Mindful Use of Technology

Technology has become an essential and valued part of our everyday experience; it has never been anything other than that for our children. As a result, students are extremely comfortable with technology, and, more often than not, it is the parent asking the child for technological support, not the other way around. At the same time, human brain development is not completed until the mid-twenties, so parents are now in the unenviable position of helping students make wise choices around devices that stimulate their brains repeatedly and provide endless distraction and social interaction.

Some research indicates that social media can increase our *sense* of social connectedness; teens certainly find comfort in connecting with friends near and far via social media. On the other hand, given the crafted persona that most present on social media, teens can also feel more isolated and "less than" when comparing themselves to others. To manage the stress of today's fast paced world, all of us, teens included, need down time away from the relentless demands of our devices, particularly our cell phones.

Keeping all of the above in mind, here are some suggestions for keeping technology in its proper place:

1) Consider evaluating your own personal technology use. Are you constantly checking your email, text messages and social media sites even when in the company of friends and family? **When with your children, turn off all but the most crucial notifications.** Parents who constantly respond to beeps and alarms on their phone send the message that their children are not as important or as interesting as the incoming emails and texts.

2) Share with your children ways in which you control how much email and social media intrude into your life. **Try to be a role model for them by setting specific times during the day when to check email and sites.** Research has found that when scientists manipulate how often people check emails--for instance, by reducing the frequency from 15 or more times a day to between three and five times, overall tension and stress levels drop dramatically. Begin by just leaving your cell phone in another room while preparing dinner or another essential task – you will find you complete the task more efficiently and you will have demonstrated (perhaps most importantly, to yourself) that it is not necessary to always be available.

3) **Consistently communicate online etiquette.** Before your child (or you) text or post, **consider three questions: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?**

4) **Establish a time each day with your child (dinner or snack time) when no phones are allowed.**

5) **If you want to acknowledge the limits of multitasking, consider having your child commit to a period of time doing homework without the phone**. Start with just half an hour. Your child may be happily surprised by how efficient they are without the distraction of the phone.

6) **Have a technology turn-off time for each person in your household.** The light alone from electronic devices can interfere with the production of melatonin, which aids in sleep. This may require the dramatic step of storing phones and tablets in your bedroom

so your child is not tempted to respond to middle of the night texts. If your children claim they need the phone as an alarm, buy him/her an old fashioned alarm clock!

7) **Enlist the support for family and friends so you are not attempting these changes alone.** Dr. Christine Carter, sociologist and happiness expert, asks friends and families to remind her of her commitment not to answer the phone or emails after 9 pm at night.

For more on this topic, check out the following links:

http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_tips_for_helping_teens_manage_technology

http://www.christinecarter.com/community/blog/2013/12/tablet-and-smartphone-boot-camp-for-middle-school-parents/

The Staples Resilience Project is an ongoing endeavor by the Staples Guidance Department aimed to promote the well-being of our students and foster a positive, inclusive school community.

shs.westportps.org/departments/guidance/staples-resilience-project