

Tether Yourself: Advice for Youth (and adults too!) on Devices

Being a kid is tough no matter the era, and it is no surprise that our kids today are facing challenging experiences these days. Smartphones, iPads, tablets, etc are everywhere and along with them is a constant bombardment of marketing tactics and psychological tricks. Between Instagram sending messages to wear the right clothes and look a specific way, social media algorithms that have our brains craving more comments, followers and likes, and the constant comparison of other people's lives, it's tough to be a young person right now.

It's also tough to be a parent these days!

This type of technology and social media is relatively new for all of us, and there's a pretty intimidating learning curve for parents everywhere. Because the previous generation did not have the internet exposure we have now, parents today have nowhere to turn to for help. We are relying on each other for tips on how to protect their children from issues with mental health, self-image, relationships, on-line predators and more that stem from the age of technology.

Rachel Macy Stafford is a best-selling author, public speaker, and parent. As part of her commitment to conscious parenting, she decided to tell the world about a unique turning point she had with her 14-year-old daughter. She (like many of us) felt an uneasiness about her child and her screen time consumption, particularly after finding a number of articles on youth suicide related to online bullying and social media use.

Rachel started a conversation with her daughter that she realized several weeks later would actually help her be noticeably *more relaxed, more interested in family time, more physically active, and more diligent with homework and chores* almost instantly.

Rachel explained to her daughter her own fears as a parent; with bullying, online pressures, etc. She told her what science actually says about kids and technology (that children's brains aren't fully developed, and so are especially susceptible to isolation, hopelessness, and more). And then she gave her a special letter. Here are just a few powerful snippets that encompass this mother's love for her child:

"Each time the phone notifies you, you stop what you are doing—whether it's homework or a job you have to do. What might take you one hour to do, will take you several, and it won't be completed as well. The inability to focus will reflect in your grades and impact the job

opportunities you have as you grow. Spending quality time with friends and family will be impacted by the need to check the phone, making you believe what is most important is on your phone when it is really the person in front of you.

"Awareness is your weapon against the hidden influences and damaging behaviors. While you are online, your mind, your thoughts, your core values are drifting to wherever tech companies want you to go. The remedy is to limit the time you spend drifting in the online world and **tether yourself to real life.**"

"Tether yourself; To real people, real conversations, and real scenery.

Tether yourself; To furry animals, interesting books, good music, the great outdoors.

Tether yourself; To spatulas, hammers, cameras, paintbrushes, and yoga mats."

"When you feel your worth is in question, when you feel lost and alone, when you feel sad and you can't explain why, **TETHER YOURSELF TO REAL LIFE AND REAL PEOPLE.**"

ESTABLISH GROUND RULES FOR SCREEN TIME Rachel followed up with a few ground rules ([which she recommends for parents too!](#)), I have added a few of my own:

- Don't charge your phone in your room overnight
- Let your friends know you won't respond to texts after 9pm
- Use a real alarm clock instead of your phone
- Hourly limits to cell phone time at home
- Dare your friends to have a sleepover with no screen time
- Set a timer for when they are on a device
- For younger kids, put all the devices away: out of sight, out of mind
- Use screen time as a reward: 30 minutes extra for completed chores and homework (without arguing!)
- Chose a day (or evening) a week with NO SCREEN time for the household
- Utilize parental controls on your Wi-Fi, modem, and devices
- Be a good role model, put down your devices and tether yourself

(Rachel's parenting tips and advice for life can be found in her book *Hands-Free Mama: A Guide to Putting Down the Phone, Burning the To-Do List, and Letting Go of Perfection to Grasp What Really Matters.*)

This article was submitted by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. She advocates for students and parents, providing a link to other supports within the community. Tammy has been a social worker for over 20 years and is a mother to 4 teenagers