

Building For Tomorrow:

A stronger community today

For over forty years scientists have collected data on the impact of electronic media on our lives. The leading factor with the most significant impact has been the television, but recently there is greater and greater competition with the growing availability of electronic games, personal computers, hand held devices and other tools. The significance of a growing arsenal of personal electronics has left more people more sedentary, more solitary and a great deal more overweight than at any time in history.

The tie-in between screen-time and obesity are clear and based on worldwide studies. The governments of China, India and France as well as the United States, Mexico, South Korea and others acknowledge the screen as a leading factor in this mounting crisis. For the first time in world history the World Health Organization has stated that obesity and overweight is now a bigger problem than hunger and starvation.

The costs associated with obesity are equally alarming and screen-time remains the great enabler, encouraging us to sit and eat, eating the things we should most stay away from. To cripple the enabler, we need a plan and the most successful plans require alternatives to the screen that get us both physically and mentally active and engaged in the world around us.

Electronic games, television and computers are addictive because they are designed to hold our attention and lull us into a state, a zone, where nothing else penetrates. To break this addiction, the alternatives have to be engaging, but also liberating. Therefore it is key to enlist the support of government, business, nonprofits and other community partners so that all screen-time alternatives are available.

STEP ONE:

Make a commitment to reduce recreational screen-time; this can fall in to any of three categories:

- A. No more than two hours per day of recreational screens 7 days per week. This includes ALL screens, so use of television, computer and games has to be planned before hand, since time can go very quickly. (Bronze Level)
- B. No more than two hours per day on weekends of recreational screens and only one hour per day during the work/school week. (Silver Level)
- C. No more than two hours per day on weekends and NO recreational screens during the school/work week. (Gold Level)

The above is not set in stone; the key thing is to find the balance that works for you and your family. If you are single, it is even more important, because the screen should not be your first choice (or last resort) for friendship.

STEP TWO:

Organize a local or regional Committee on Screen-Time. Start with people you know, the local PTA, museum director, garden center owner, supermarket manager, sporting goods store owner, bookstore operator, teachers, healthcare providers, governmental officials and anyone else you can think of. The more diverse the membership in the group the better the group will function. The more people who offer an alternative to screens (the local tennis court, golf course, bowling alley, park and recreation director, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, library, Yoga center and the list goes on and on) the better set you will be when you start on this journey.

The group must be prepared to meet every four to six weeks (even if by telephone) and everyone should serve on a smaller committee designed to produce and promote specific activities on a regular or semi-regular basis. Many local bookstores have readings or guest authors. Let the bookstore know what you like, what the group is interested in. This gets more people in the store and provides the community with another activity, one with real people in real time. Other groups can do the same thing. The local coffee house can sponsor a poetry slam, a law firm can encourage a “community film project,” where the people in town actually make the film and the supermarket can do a series of classes on how parents and children can make healthy meals together.

This is good for business, the local nonprofits and it is great for the community.

STEP THREE:

Make sure there is a leader of the Committee, even if that person rotates on a regular basis. You want to make sure someone takes notes, someone keeps track of when the meetings are scheduled and someone is in contact with the local newspaper (get that person to join the committee as well). Do not let disorganization stop you from moving forward.

STEP FOUR:

Make sure all the schools in your community are involved including the public, private and parochial schools. If you have a university, include them as well, they can be a big help and provide a great many alternatives to the screen. Get your local school board to make screen-time-reduction (and Turnoff Week) a plank in your school system’s official Wellness Plan and encourage all schools in your district to fully participate in the annual Turnoff Week program.

STEP FIVE:

Involve yourself in community projects; get the Committee to do so as well. Ideally, get each committee member and their family to get active.

STEP SIX:

Rearrange the furniture in your home. Turn your living room and family room into places for interaction, games and conversation, not min-theaters. Put the screens away, or at least make them less central to the room and your life. Don't have all the furniture facing the screen, have the furniture face away from the screen, so if you want to watch, you have to make an effort...don't make it too easy to fall back into old habits.

STEP SEVEN:

Get screens out of bedrooms, kitchens and other rooms. How many do you really need? People who watch television or videos during meals eat more and often eat things that are less healthy. Screens located in bedrooms lead to overeating, poorer sleep habits and much more screen-time. This is especially bad for children, since grades suffer as well.

STEP EIGHT:

Set up a regular game night at home, with family or friends or both. It should be the same night each week, so that people remember it. The options for games, cards or other activity are up to the participants, the point is it is scheduled and sacred.

STEP NINE:

Establish an alternating dinner party with a group of friends or relatives. Each week the group meets at another person's home. Prior to the dinner a topic is selected, or a special guest is invited to stir discussion. This could be based on a newspaper article, a book people are reading or anything under the sun. Once again, dates should be set, so there is no backing out.

STEP TEN:

Make sure you find yourself doing things you want to do, make sure you are doing those things with people you want to be with. It is vital for you to enjoy this step into a new way of living, without feeling good about this change you will not have success.

SIGN UP:

Individuals, families, businesses, schools, community organizations and join us in this march to the future, making today a better place to live.

NAME:

ADDRESS:

TEL:

EMAIL:

I am going to join this effort at (circle one, levels are listed above) A B C

I will participate alone_____

My family will participate _____

My office will participate _____

My organization will participate _____

Other _____