

An **EGM Educational Systems** White Paper



PO Box 287
Spring House, PA 19477
215-643-5558
www.OurHomeworkHelper.com

Balancing technology and conversation with kids in our high tech world.

By Elaine Meyers, President & CEO

February 1 , 2012

Overview

Technology is everywhere in today's world, from the nursery to the senior centers. We use it to communicate, acquire knowledge, improve productivity and for entertainment. Technology is a significant factor in propelling our global economy. Fluency in various forms of communication is a necessity as we come in contact with others at a distance as well as in different cultural settings. We need the ability to use both technology and personal communications skills in order to be successful in today's world.

This is especially true for children of the 21st century. Indeed, for kids instantaneous access to information, countless educational programs, and computer games is the accepted norm. Life without technology is unimaginable for them, and they fully embrace it. Not only do kids love technology, but so do their parents. It's an easy way to keep kids busy while parents get other things done. Nonetheless, it is perhaps surprising how little we question the benefits of technology. Just like too much dessert with dinner, too much technology can have unpleasant consequences.

While technology has improved productivity for our society on many levels, serious consideration is now being given to the impact that the use of technology has on developing relationships and understanding what others are trying to communicate. Researchers are concerned that the increasing use of technology is resulting in a decrease in face to face interactions and in-person conversations. This is a particular concern for the current generation of children, who will need strong personal communication skills as adults working in our ever expanding global environment.

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Recent news articles have addressed how the use of technology, by parents, is impacting our children. In his piece in the MIT News Office “[The lonely crowd](#),” Peter Dizikes begins by stating "The next time you are in a public place where families gather, such as a playground, a children's soccer game or a museum, see how many parents are focused on their mobile phones instead of watching their kids. The compulsive attention people pay to their mobile devices is becoming a trend that should concern us, according to MIT professor Sherry Turkle. In her new book, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other ...* Turkle suggests that the time is ripe for widespread rethinking of the way we use cutting-edge technology."

In an article published in [The New York Times](#), author Julie Scelfo states: “Much of the concern about cell phones and instant messaging and Twitter has been focused on how children who incessantly use the technology are affected by it. But parents’ use of such technology — and its effect on their offspring — is now becoming an equal source of concern to some child-development researchers. ... There is little research on how parents’ constant use of such technology affects children, but experts say there is no question that engaged parenting — talking and explaining things to children, and responding to their questions — remains the bedrock of early childhood learning.” Put together, these experts converge in

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the consensus that parents need to put down the phone and talk to their children. We cannot neglect the importance of a face to face conversation.

Face to face conversations involve far more than the words being spoken. Experts have shown that nonverbal aspects of conversation can communicate more than the actual words, sometimes significantly more. Nonverbal parts of communication include facial expressions, body movements, posture, gestures, eye contact, touch, space (how close someone is) and tone of voice.

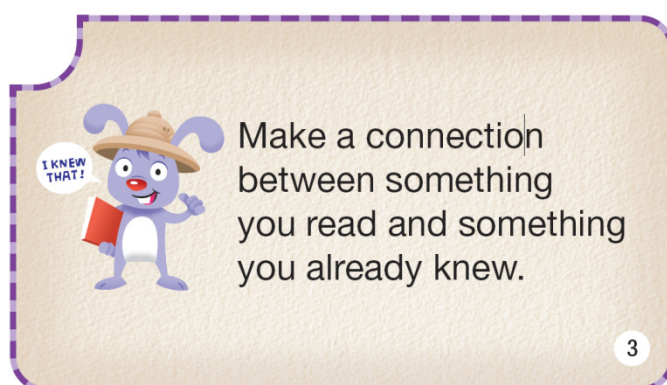
“ Face to face conversations involve far more than the words being spoken.”

So, as parents, what can we do to maintain a balance between the use of technology and personal interaction? Actually, quite a lot. Limiting the amount of time children are permitted to watch TV, play computer games or surf the Internet is a good start. Another is to create “tech-free” times or zones. For example, agree to stop all texting, reading, e-mail or talking on the phone during meal time. Above all, you can lead by example. The next time you take the kids to an event, turn off your Smartphone and enjoy watching your kids participate.

How READS Helps to Enhance Conversation

A perfect and important opportunity for meaningful conversation is when your child does reading homework. While children may read material online or in an electronic book, technology should not be used to verify that your child understood the material. There are products on the market that use multiple choice tests to ascertain comprehension, but selecting A, B, C or D doesn't provide the opportunity for conversation. It's the interaction between parent and child that enhances the child's critical thinking skills, helps the child to learn to express themselves verbally, and teaches the child how to interpret and provide non verbal forms of communication.

Since we believe that parents are the ultimate teachers, we created the award winning product, READS, to help parents develop a dialogue with their children about what the children have read. READS is based on 30 question cards that work with any reading material. Each card also contains a visual clue to help the child understand and remember the question. By having the child answer a question from the cards, the parent can both verify that the child understood what was read and also use the response as the basis for further conversation. For example, here are three READS question cards, along with what is expected in an answer.



Making a meaningful connection between what your child reads and what she knows or has experienced demonstrates enhanced understanding. A meaningful connection would sound like “I know how upset Elizabeth was when her Mom said she couldn't go out because I remember when I wasn't able to go to my friend's party because I was sick.”



Summarize the important events in the story.

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Children need a lot of practice separating important events from details. Often they spend too much time retelling details that do not impact the story's outcome. This is one time to encourage a short answer! To help your child stick to the important points, you can ask "What happened first?" "What happened next?" "Then what happened?" and "How did it end?"



Tell two things you liked about the story.

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"It was funny" is a typical answer to this question. However, by requiring your child to support his answer with meaningful examples, he will focus as he reads, think about what really captures his interest and begin making more of the connections that develop higher thinking skills.

If the answer the child gives is not the one expected, or, the child can't answer the question at all, strategies to address these situations are contained in the READS Parent Manual.

A major benefit to this program is that this question and answer strategy can also be used with television programs, movies and plays. Using these guided questions, parents and children can have a more enriching dialogue in various settings.

Conclusion

While we can draw on technology to promote our children's learning in some ways, we cannot allow it to supplant our personal role in the development of their personal communication skills. As we prepare our children to be successful workers in a world made smaller by technological advances, we must ensure that they develop all the pertinent skill sets.

The key to finding the counterbalance to technology is to engage the child in meaningful conversation. It is through this dialogue that children will learn to express themselves verbally, improve their critical thinking skills and develop relationships with others. These are the skills that will help them reach their fullest potential as they grow from children into adults

“The key is to engage the child in meaningful conversation. ”

About EGM Educational Systems

EGM Educational Systems, LLC was founded in 2009 by Elaine Meyers, M.Ed. Elaine is a certified reading specialist in a suburban Philadelphia school district who has spent more than 25 years helping and guiding young readers and their parents. She combined her own experiences and her desire to develop more confident readers to create READS, an at-home reading tool that works with any reading material. READS helps to ensure that children comprehend what they've read, builds critical thinking skills and promotes conversation between parent and child. Learn more about READS by visiting <http://www.OurHomeworkHelper.com>

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