# Reclaiming Tech-Free Family Time

Technology has become an integral part of our daily lives. Gadgets and gizmos include cellular telephones, televisions, video game consoles, DVD players, MP3 players, and computers just to name a few. These items allow constant contact with each other and place the world within fingertip reach. Most of the time, it seems difficult to remember life before these wonderful inventions. Yet, like any modern advance, technology has had both positive and negative effects. Below are listed only a few, specifically related to children and teens.

## Positive Aspects of Technology

-Technology allows for maintaining social relationships. With the advent of sites such as Facebook, children and teens are able to easily keep in touch with family and friends who may live half way around the world such as an older sibling away at college.

-With the use of a controller, video games help to enhance fine motor skills and coordination.

-Computer and video games can promote problem solving, as children and teens are often required to focus and think through actions.

-Through the World Wide Web, children and teens can connect with others whom they might not encounter on a daily basis. For example, various chat forums are available for children and teens with emotional difficulties, physical disabilities, or diseases such as cancer. Such sites promote a sense of normalcy and belonging.

## Negative Aspects of Technology

-Too much time in front of a television or computer can lead to obesity and the accompanying health issues such as diabetes.

-If homework time is rushed or shortened in favor of television or computer time, lower academic grades may follow.

-The more time a person spends interacting on-line, the less they interact in person, which can lead to decreased social skills.

-With the advent of cyberspace, bullying has taken on a different form, as evidenced by many recent media reports.

## Rekindle Family Togetherness

Technology, like any good thing, should be enjoyed in moderation. Use gadgets to enhance life while still maintaining positive, meaningful, face-to-face social interactions. Here are some tips to increase technology-free time, particularly within your family.

1. Establish Limits: Set guidelines regarding when each family member can use each gadget, for how long, and for what purpose.

2. Take a Time Out: Set aside time to turn off all gadgets. Don't check your e-mail. Don't allow your teen to text. Take time for your family to give their undivided attention to each other.

3. Set a Positive Example: Be the one to role model responsible usage for your child or teen. If you don't want them to text during dinner, then you should not either.

4. Have Family Dinner: With busy work and school schedules, often dinner together gets pushed aside. Reestablish this time-honored tradition at least several days a week.

5. Go Outside: Take a walk. Play in the park. Get the whole family off the couch. This will allow you to connect with each other and with nature, while promoting a healthy active lifestyle.

6. Play a Board Game: Dust off that Candy Land, Sorry, or Uno. Such games have been around for a long time and for good reason. Even teens will enjoy a family game night.

7. Be Creative: Incorporate art or craft activities. Make pottery. Build a model plane. Paint canvases, creating art for your walls.

8. Plan a Family Project: Get your family working together towards a goal. Clean out the garage and have a yard sale, splitting the profit. Plan a vacation. Start a scrapbook.

9. Give Back: Volunteer as a family. In a materialist world, this helps your child or teen to recognize the benefit of charitable acts.

10. Talk: No matter what you do with your tech-free time, remember to communicate. Talk about your thoughts and feelings and encourage your child or teen to do the same.