Family Digital Media Plan Components

How to Use this Guide

This is one part of a two-document set. The other document is a template your family can use to produce a written digital media usage Plan. This document contains a bunch of ideas you can copy and paste into the Plan document you adopt as a family. You can also use these ideas to inspire practices you come up with yourselves. What you'll find here is the following:

- Value statements: You can use these as an outline of your "why," or as inspiration to write your own goal/vision statements.
- Family habits: Some of your digital media plan will include habits your family engages in together. We've got ideas for daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly practices.
- Personal habits: Many of the most critical habits can't be practiced *together*, even if everyone in the family adopts the same habit. It's on the individual to self-lead in implementing these practices.
- Resources: these are technologies and tools you can use to aid implementation as well as content you can engage to keep learning more.

As you develop your plan, remember to be kind and gracious to yourself and your family.

- Be **selective** about the habits you choose. Many ideas are here, but it's always better to choose a few that you can stick to over many you can't.
- **Do not try to adopt changes all at once!** The Plan document has an "implementation intention" section to help you meet your commitments *and* make sure you don't overburden yourselves.
- You are trying to establish **norms**, **not** obtain **perfection**. Some days are just awful and it makes sense to relax some practices—order that pizza, watch that dumb movie, let the kids play those video games. You want to be consistent enough for that to feel different and special. But such flexibility can be a feature, not a bug, in your plan.
- Parents, **let your kids participate in building this**. If a kid has too little say in the family practices, and especially in their own, the entire project will be dramatically less effective for them. You will have much more power to help kids fight for a vision of digital health if it's their vision too!
- To put it bluntly, an aggressive, low-grace approach is *giving into*, not *resisting*, the ugly side effects of the digital age!
  - The drive to do **all the things** comes from getting advertised at everywhere.
  - **Hurry** and **anxiety** are symptoms of an always-on ecosystem.
  - **Perfectionism** is just more of projecting a curated (not-vulnerable) self.
  - **Control** (especially of your kids) is a piece of tech's manipulative allure.

Just opening up this document is a big step toward being intentional, rather than accidental, in guiding your family's (and your own!) relationship with technology. The goal of this

document is to help you be in the digital world without being of it. That is, you have technology in your lives and some digital or online presence. But you are choosing not to drift into the problems technology can bring to time management and to mental, emotional, social, or even spiritual health. This journey is an uphill climb. But it is absolutely worth taking.

You can just copy and paste any or all of these values statements into your family's plan. For just about any Christian family on this journey, these work as vision statements. You may also use these as inspiration for crafting your own vision statements.

Values Statements
- We want lifestyles and habits that make it easier, not harder, to be like Jesus.
- Real-time interactions are higher in priority than screen-mediated ones.
- Through purposeful curation, we pursue satisfying engagement with media.
- As beloved, rescued sinners, we embrace grace with self and others.

*Below are habits that the family can adopt together. The difference between these habits and the personal ones later in the document is that the family practices these together, as a unit. Usually, a parent leads the charge for executing these habits (note: couples **should not** let the same parent be responsible for all implementations!).*

These practices comprise habits of engagement (where you purposefully do something) and habits of abstinence (where you purposefully refrain from something) from the world of spiritual disciplines. Habits of abstinence have italics; engagement, underlines. Some are both.

The time domains are somewhat flexible. "Standing" usually means something that is generally, passively in effect. For instance, having screentime active on a smartphone is a "standing" habit. "Daily" does not have to mean every day. It just means multiple times per week, whether that's Tuesday and Thursday only, all weekdays, or something else. The weekly, monthly, and quarterly habits can also be practiced more or less often than needed. Your family may need some "monthly" habits weekly or some "quarterly" habits annually. It's all about what fits your family.

Family Habits

Standing / Daily
- *Overnight phone return*: each night at 10:00pm, phones will go to the family recharging center. We'll wake up in the morning with—get this—alarm clocks!
- <u>Text benediction</u>: Each weekday, dad (or mom) will choose one verse to serve as a benediction for the day alongside an "I love you" to everyone in the family.
- *<u>The golden hour</u>*: while one parent cleans up after dinner, the other parent will play with kids in a non-screen-mediated format.
- *The amazing hour*: One hour before bed (perhaps 9:30-10:30pm), we will refrain from screens to help ourselves power down.

- *Internet filtration*: To block obscene content, we will use a service such as Net Angel to filter our home WiFi.
- *Car time is conversation time*: On car rides less than 45 minutes in length, we lean into conversations instead of devices.
- *Phone-free meal times*: Devices of all kinds are to be placed in a cradle at meal times.

Weekly
- Family movie night: On alternating Thursdays, we will have a movie theater inspired dinner and watch a movie from the "canon" of great movies together.
- Family game night: On alternating Fridays, we'll play a rounds of a family favorite game together (Rocket League, Mario Kart/Party/Tennis/Strikers, It Takes Two, Halo)
- *Screentime monitors*: on Sundays, we'll check in on screentime and make modifications for the next week as necessary.
- *Digital Sabbath*: On Mondays, TVs will not be used and phone apps will be limited. When everyone is home, phones will be for emergency use only and the only screen allowed will be computers—for homework only. (May work on a less frequent basis)

Monthly
- *Digital noise blockout*: on certain Saturdays before 11:00am, we will refrain from using screens or digitally-supported music in order to have time together as a family. (May work on a less frequent basis)
- Celebration day: We'll go out to a nice dinner and/or fun activity (such as a movie or mini-golf) and spend some time celebrating the "wins" from our intentional digital engagement.
- Community game night: Gathering friends together, we'll watch a couple of movies or have a big video game tournament.
- *Handwritten letters night*: Spend a little time write letters by hand and send them to friends and family.

Quarterly
- *Disconnect to connect*: We will spend a whole day or a whole weekend doing some activity such as camping, skiing, or hiking in which we also engage in a digital fast together.
- Family digital media reassessment: one night during and after dinner, we will look at our digital media commitments and decide on what is working, what is sustainable, what is having the effects they're supposed to have. We may re-do our media plan.

Personal Digital Media Plan Components

Standing

- *App restrictions*: Certain platforms (Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, etc.) cannot be downloaded to my phone.
- *Downtime*: My phone's downtime feature will be turned on between 10pm and 7am.
- *Covenant Eyes*: I will have Covenant Eyes blocking sexual content on my phone and computer.
- *Parental Controls*: I will keep parental controls for my Nintendo Switch (or other game system) turned on. They will lock me out after 2 hours of usage.
- *Turn down the distraction capacity of my phone*: I will keep the format of my phones' homescreen optimized for minimizing distractions with such strategies as turning the display to black and white, placing trigger apps in awkward folders, and deactivating most push notifications.
- <u>Never clicking "like:"</u> On social media apps, I will never *only* click a "like" or react button. Instead, I will use words to let someone know I'm thinking about them.
- *No social media*: Social media is too much like "Babylon" to me; I just won't have any accounts.
- *WiFi timer*: Using an outlet timer such as [this one](#), I will have hours during which my home WiFi is unavailable.
- <u>*Longform news only*</u>: I will refrain from engaging breaking news; I will get my information about current events in reflective, essay-style pieces.
- <u>*Paid digital information only*</u>: My engagement with news media will comprise only the news outlets I pay for. I will avoid news resources that make their revenue by advertising to me.

Daily

- <u>*Scripture before phone*</u>: I'll spend a moment reading scripture—even just a verse—before I pick up my phone in the morning.
- *Time limit for social media and BUMMER apps*: I'll keep the "time limit" feature turned on for Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok, etc. so I get "time limit" notifications on those apps after an hour.
- *Phone box time*: During the hours of 5-7pm, my phone will be in a drawer. Or, I will keep my phone in an Aro box and aim for making my daily limit.
- *Workday shutdown*: At 4:50pm on work days,, I will do one last Slack or Inbox check, then place my computer and/or tablet inside my desk. I will say a very short prayer committing my work to God. Then, I won't get back into it for the rest of the evening.
- <u>Intentional News Roundup</u>: At a specified time on specified days, I will read key newsletters and make rounds on news websites. I will avoid the passive consumption of news or information.
- <u>*Deep work time-blocking*</u>: I will mono-task during key, 2-hour blocks of my workday.

- *Parenting my phone:* I put my phone to bed before I go, and wake it up after I'm up.

<div align="center">*Weekly*</div>

- *Screentime check-in*: If my daily phone screentime exceeds 140 minutes, I will delete the most time-consuming apps for the week.
- *Non-gaming days*: I am not a gamer Mondays-Wednesdays.
- <u>Personal movie education</u>: The night before family movie night, I'll read up on major hit movies and propose additions to the family movie night canon.
- <u>Gaming night</u>: my friends and I will gather on [Friday] from [8-10pm] to play video games together.

<div align="center">*Monthly (or less)*</div>

- <u>Release weekend special</u>: on the Friday and Saturday that a new game comes out, I will get any weekend homework done ahead of schedule so I can really enjoy a new game.
- *Culling the follow list*: once a quarter, I will see what/who I am following. Anything that is not a "heck yes!" gets unfollowed.
- <u>*Re-curate my media collection*</u>: I'll work through my video games, movies, streaming services, etc. once per month and change what I have access to so that my collection feels fresh.
- *Mood and attitude check-in:* Once a month, I will scroll through my social media account(s) and see how they make me feel. If the feeling is more negative than positive, I'll deactivate the account and delete the apps for two weeks and see if that makes my overall outlook better.

<div align="center">*Annually*</div>

- <u>*Have an uninstall party*</u>: I'll delete apps, social media connections, entertainment that I notice waste time.
- *Low tech January / Lent*: If not being used for work purposes, my phone goes into storage for the month of January or during the Lenten season.
- <u>Media Plan refresh</u>: during the week after my birthday, I will look over my media plan and adjust to make it more realistic or effective.

Accountability and Celebration
For especially critical practices, blessings for success and censures for delinquency might make sense. Here are some ideas:
- If the Covenant Eyes report stops coming in, it's time to trade the smart phone for a light phone.
- If video game daily time limits are exceeded 3 times in a 10-day period, the device goes in storage for a week.
- After completing a low tech January, a community video game party is in order
- Get that nice, expensive Starbucks concoction after 3 successful days in a row of parenting the phone at night.

Resources

Technological Tools
These tools or apps can help facilitate your family's ability to stick with a plan.

Software
- [Cold Turkey](), a one-time paid app that locks you out of certain websites or computer features. You can lock yourself out of breaking your own rules.
- [Focus](), a Mac-only user-friendly Cold Turkey counterpart.
- [Freedom](), a user-friendly distraction blocker app for multiple devices
- [Opal]() a phone-wrangling app that goes beyond what Apple builds into the screentime and downtime features of the iPhone
- [One Sec](), an app that forces users to pause before entering certain apps, interrupting the unconscious usage of an app
- [Manual for Apple's built-in parental controls]()
- Parental control guides for [Playstation](), [Xbox](), and [Switch]()
- [Covenant Eyes](), a service for fighting pornography through accountability and filtering

Devices
- The [Aro](), an elegant phone cradle box with a linked app.
- [Gabb](), a company that makes phones and smartwatches with intentionally limited functionality to support child safety.
- The [Bark phone](), a phone with high-level parental controls for custom functionality limitations
- The [light phone](), a minimalist-styled phone with intentionally limited functionality
- A programmable [outlet timer]().

Online Articles

Discussions of the Issues
- ["I Used to Be a Human Being" / "My Distraction Sickness and Yours"]() by Andrew Sullivan, *New York Magazine*, September 2016.
- Digest of [Jaron Lanier's reasons why social media is a BUMMER]() (Behaviors of Users Modified and Made into an Empire for Rent) from *The Guardian*
- Report on [Facebook whistleblower Sophie Zheng](), who discovered how a Facebook loophole let politicians enhance corruption, from *The Guardian*, April 2021.
- ["Who Is Making Sure the A.I. Machines Aren't Racist?"]() by Cade Metz, a *New York Times*-published excerpt of Metz's new book, March 2021
- [Pew Research stats]() on smartphone usage
- [Pew Research stats]() on internet usage
- [Pew Research stats]() on social media usage

Towards Solutions
- A [Digital Flourishing self-assessment](#) from the Digital Wellness Institute
- Bonnie Kristian, "[The Spiritual Battle of Teen Screentime](#)," *Christianity Today,* June 2023.
- Douglas S. Bursch, "[Can We Post Our Way to Peace](#)?" *Relevant Magazine*, June 2023
- Tyler Huckabee, "[How the Church Can Help Shape the Digital Age](#)," *Relevant Magazine*, June 2022

Podcasts
- Jerrad Lopes and Felicia Wu Song, *Dad Tired*, "[How to Know when Your Devices are Shaping Your Family](#)."
- Tristan Harris and The Center for Humane Technology, *[Your Undivided Attention](#)*.
- Cameron Cole and Rooted Ministry, *Rooted Parent*, "[Parenting, Technology, and the Truth](#)." It is the first of several episodes on technology.

Books
- Jaron Lanier, *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (Picador, 2018)
- *Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (Portfolio, 2019)
- Nir Eyal, *Indistractable: How to Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life* (BenBella, 2019)
- James Williams, *Stand Out of Our Light: Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). [Open access book; a full pdf from Cambridge University Press is here.](#)
- Amy Crouch and Andy Crouch, *My Tech-Wise Life: Growing Up and Making Choices in a World of Devices* (Maker, 2020)
- Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Baker, 2017). This book is available through Kindle Unlimited.
- Samuel James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom in an Online Age* (Crossway, 2023)
- Jay Y. Kim, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, and Things in the Digital Age* (InterVarsity Press, 2020)
- *Felicia Wu Song, *Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence, and Place in the Digital Age* (InterVarsity Press, 2021)