

# FALL DOWN 7 TIMES GET UP 8

RAISING AND TEACHING  
SELF-MOTIVATED  
LEARNERS, K-12

SECOND  
EDITION



DEBBIE SILVER

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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Fall Down 7 Times, Get Up 8* by Debbie Silver. Chapter 9 explains finding balance in a digital world.

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# FINDING BALANCE WITH THE DIGITAL WORLD

## CHAPTER 9

*The more you can concentrate the better you'll do on anything, because whatever talent you have, you can't apply it if you are distracted.*

—Daniel Goleman, 2013

Generally speaking, people today *have* more and *know* more than ever before, but absurd paradoxes abound. Traditional rites of passage like getting a driver's license and moving out of the family home are being delayed or avoided all together. New technology presents revolutionary methods to support student learning, yet somehow it impairs communication among humans. Children are suffering more anxiety and depression, which many researchers attribute to overuse and misuse of personal devices and social media. Too much screen time is evolving as the next big crisis for teachers, parents/guardians, and students.

Jean Twenge, a social psychologist at San Diego State University, calls the generation following the millennials, "iGen," which is short for "Internet generation." (Some call this age group "Gen Z.") In her 2017 book *iGen*, she notes that children born after 1995 are the first generation to have grown up with total access to the Internet during their entire lives. By the time they reached middle school, they had iPhones and social media readily available to them. Twenge believes that countless members of iGen have become addicted to their personal devices and have started spending far less time than any previous generation meeting with friends apart from the immediate supervision of an adult.

Twenge and other researchers are on a mission to alert adults about how much time kids spend on their personal devices as well as what they are doing (and not doing) while they are on them (Twenge, 2017; Stoffel, 2019; Borba, 2016; Burch, 2019). Currently there are numerous books and articles that

raise alarm bells about dangers lurking in social media and with personal devices. They list extensive rules for restricting student access and use of personal devices as well as provide endless tips for teachers and parents/guardians about how to censor what children are doing. Instead of scaring teachers and parents/guardians into micromanaging their learners 24/7, I think it is much healthier to focus on general safety precautions and sensible use agreements. In keeping with this book's purpose of building lifelong learners, Chapter 9 emphasizes preparing students to use self-regulation for making appropriate choices with digital media.

## Distracted Learning

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**Figure 9.1**

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The concept of *flow* as described in Chapter 3 is a state of highly concentrated action and awareness. Flow is the quintessential model of sustained focus. We want our learners to be able to reach this state as much as possible, but studies find that rises in personal device use are causing increased distractibility in learners. Excessive screen time seems to be highly correlated to the upsurge in reported ADD, ADHD, and other interference issues involving the brain's executive function systems. In his book, *Focus* (2013), Daniel Goleman

warns, “Attention is under siege more than it has ever been in human history, we have more distractions than ever before, we have to be more focused on cultivating the skills of attention.”

Many students believe they concentrate better when they are *multitasking* (doing more than one thing at a time), so they frequently have more than one screen open and vacillate from one task to another. According to the American Psychological Association’s overview of multitasking research, there are three types of multitasking:

1. **Performing two tasks simultaneously.** This includes talking on the phone while driving or answering email during a webinar.
2. **Switching from one task to another without completing the first task.** We’ve all been right in the middle of focused work when an urgent task demands our attention; this is one of the most frustrating kinds of multitasking and often the hardest to avoid.
3. **Performing two or more tasks in rapid succession.** It almost doesn’t seem like multitasking at all, but our minds need time to change gears in order to work efficiently (2006, para. 2).

Kids like to argue that their generation grew up with digital devices and they are, therefore, much better at multitasking than the adults who complain when they do it. Goleman (2013), along with a significant number of brain researchers, refutes their misguided reasoning with scientific evidence proving the skill of multitasking is a myth. Neurobiologists have analyzed brain scans to find that when people say they are multitasking, they are really doing something called “continuous partial attention,” where the brain switches back and forth quickly between tasks. “The problem is that as a student switches back and forth between homework and streaming through text messages, their ability to focus on either task erodes” (Schwartz, 2013).

According to Annie Murphy Paul (2013), studies in psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience suggest that when students multitask while doing schoolwork, their learning is far spottier and narrower than if the work had their full attention. Students understand and remember less, and they have greater difficulty transferring their learning to new contexts. Some researchers see the practice of multitasking as so

detrimental that they are proposing there is a new “marshmallow test” (see Chapter 6) for determining self-discipline—the ability to resist a blinking inbox or a buzzing phone.

Although many uphold multitasking as a badge of accomplishment, believing they are more productive than their non-multitasking peers, teachers, and parents/guardians, studies show that multitasking actually reduces productivity by as much as 40% (American Psychological Association, 2006). Perhaps it would be more instructive to change the term “multitasking” to the more accurate label “multi-switching” to make students aware of what is actually happening in their brains.

Daniel Goleman suggests teachers and parents/guardians routinely incorporate activities and discussions designed to help students control their attentional focus. He recommends that adults teach and make time to practice mindfulness on a regular basis (see Chapter 6).

I don't think the enemy is digital devices. What we need to do is be sure that the current generation of children has the attentional capacities that other generations had naturally before the distractions of digital devices. It's about using the devices smartly but having the capacity to concentrate as you need to, when you want to.  
(Goleman, 2013)

## TRY THIS



### QR Code 9.1 There's a Cell Phone in Your Student's Head

<https://www.edutopia.org/video/theres-cell-phone-your-students-head>

Take two minutes and watch the video in QR Code 9.1 about how cell phone proximity changes student learning, then do the following:

- Reflect on what you have observed about a learner's ability to focus when their cell phone or smart device is in different positions/distances from their body.

- Reflect on your own distractibility when your cell phone or other smart device is in different positions/distances from your body.
- Watch the video again with your learner(s) and discuss what the science says about a device's different positions/distances from the body during certain activities.
- Form a plan for yourself and your learner(s) about future positions/distances of personal devices during various circumstances. ●

QR Code 9.2 also leads to an excellent podcast for teachers and parents/guardians on the cost of multitasking.



**QR Code 9.2 Podcast “*Emotional Intelligence Author on Why Cultivating Focus Is Key to Success*”**

<https://www.kqed.org/forum/201311210900/emotional-intelligence-author-on-why-cultivating-focus-is-key-to-success>

## Guidelines for Young Children

Teachers and parents/guardians of younger children are largely aware that it is inadvisable to allow more than occasional screen time viewing for children below 5 years of age. Important developmental functions in the brain are disrupted by the constant barrage of color and sound from screens, and essential emotional connections are not made when children view screens instead of real faces. The American Academy for Pediatrics strongly recommends prohibiting or at least limiting screen time for children under 5 years of age.

### ●●● SCREEN TIME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Younger than 18 months: Video chatting only (such as with close relatives)
- 18–24 months: Only high-quality programming watched together with an adult
- Two to five years: One hour of individual time maximum per day ●

—American Academy of Pediatrics, 2020

Young children need to listen to stories that allow them to visualize images, words, and pictures. Smart devices provide too much of the information kids should be creating for themselves. In *Psychology Today*, Margalit Liraz discusses the damage that can be done through a premature introduction to digital media.

The ability to focus, to concentrate, to lend attention, to sense other people's attitudes and communicate with them, to build a large vocabulary—all those abilities are harmed. And not just for a while. If the damage happens during these crucial early years, its results can affect them forever. (2016)

An enlightening video about toddlers' need to connect with a significant adult face-to-face can be viewed in this short *Screen Time Special* preview at QR Code 9.3.



QR Code 9.3 Diane Sawyer's Preview of Her *Screen Time Special* on ABC

<https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/news/video/parents-impact-screen-time-babies-toddlers-62774533>

## Guidelines for Elementary Age Children

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Depending on the child and the circumstances, screen time can be gradually increased after age 5. There was a time when the delineation of “older children” fell somewhere between the ages of 6 to 10 years old. However, today the clear parameters of childhood have been blurred by faster maturing children, particularly when it comes to media use.

In his 2019 *Parenting the New Teen in the Age of Anxiety*, clinical psychologist Dr. John Duffy discusses the brand-new reality that younger children are adopting the behaviors and attitudes previously exhibited in tweens and teens. These include, but are not limited to

- A draw toward social media
- Development of sexual identity

- Body consciousness
- Mention of feeling depressed or anxious
- Talking back
- Testing boundaries behaviorally (p. 25)

In talking with teachers and parent/guardians as well as observing my own grandkids, I realize children in primary and intermediate grades are digital whizzes and are more tech savvy than any previous generation at that age. Their digital prowess far exceeds their emotional maturity, so it is incumbent on teachers and parents/guardians to judge when and how much to increase their media privileges. Most researchers recommend a delay in giving children their own devices for as long as possible and then starting with a flip phone with no Internet access rather than a smart phone. Of course, many elementary children already have an iPad or Chromebook of some sort required for school.

The introduction of virtual school has stretched the previously recommended screen time limits suggested by child development specialists. For children six and older, it is important to place limitations on recreational time and types of media they access. Make sure the media is high quality and does not take the place of adequate sleep, outdoor time, free play, face-to-face interactions, reading (with an adult or alone), and other behaviors essential to health. The general guidelines in the next section can be applied to elementary age students as well as tweens and teens.

## General Guidelines

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As teachers and parents/guardians, we need to keep a constant dialogue (not lectures) with learners about the amount of time they spend and the quality of what they do with their personal devices. Ongoing conversations should be calm and nonjudgmental. Silicon Valley-based behavior expert, Ana Homayoun (2017), advises teachers and parents/guardians to focus on healthy socialization, safety, and self-regulation: “We need to help kids make better choices intrinsically. Give them freedom and responsibility, but with bumper lanes.” The following ideas come from her suggestions for cultivating media wellness and personal agency in finding balance with the digital world.



## ●●● SENSIBLE SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS

### 1. **Check your kid's phone.**

*Let students know you might ask for their phone at any time and must be allowed full access to everything on it. Tell them you don't intend to monitor their every online move, but you are still responsible for what they as minors post or receive online. Make the distinction between privacy and safety and let them know responsible choices on their part will make your monitoring less frequent. If you see something that disturbs you, ask them about it and give them a chance to explain why it is there. Together decide if it is a safe, healthy, and appropriate use for their device and if it correlates with their values.*

### 2. **Be app-savvy.**

*It is the adult's job to be familiar with the apps and social platforms kids are using. On your own device, download and try all of the apps your students use. Your learners are more likely to talk with you about an issue that pops up if they know that you understand social media. Have your students come up with a "crisis team" that can help them deal with problems. They can identify three "support people" they can call on as needed. Team members can be parents, guardians, teachers, coaches, trusted family members, or even a Crisis Text Line.*

### 3. **Help kids understand their "why."**

*Inspire kids to act out of self-motivation instead of fear by helping them build their own filters. Encourage them to ask themselves questions like, "Why am I picking up my phone? Am I bored, am I lonely, am I sad? Am I just uncomfortable in a room where I don't know anyone?" Or "Why am I posting this? Is it true? Is it helpful? Will it cause pain?" Or "Does spending time on this game or app reflect the values I have set for myself?" Asking themselves "why" slows down impulsive communications and encourages kids to make smarter choices.*

### 4. **Set clear ground rules.**

*Talk to kids about appropriate social media use, gaming, and so forth, before you hand them a device or let them download an app.*

*Once you hand it over, they will be too excited and distracted to fully digest your instructions. Clearly state rules and expectations and stick to them as much as possible. Rules might include only posting things they would be comfortable with their friends' parents or their grandma reading, asking permission before downloading an app, leaving the phone in the kitchen or common family area before bedtime. It's best if the adults work with learners to create a family mission or class mission statement about responsible technology use.*

**5. Create opportunities for digital detox.**

*Help kids plan a time budget for doing homework, playing outside, visiting face-to-face with friends, and doing chores around the house. They need to learn to be okay with being offline. Parents can start by modeling the behavior: No phones at the dinner table, no checking devices when talking to another person, no phones in the bathroom, phones off one hour before bedtime, no phones before completely ready for school, or whatever works for your family or class. Including kids in the planning gives them a sense of autonomy and relatedness—important steps toward building self-efficacy in their media usage. ●*

—adapted from Ana Homayoun, 2017

Harvard MD, Michael Rich, also addresses the issue of sharing the responsibility of creating sensible use agreements and a digital time budget with kids:

Based on the latest research, I recommend that children, teens and their parents sit down together and actively approach their 24-hour day as valuable time to be used in ways that support a healthy lifestyle.

Thinking of their day as an empty glass, they should fill it with the essentials; enough sleep to grow and avoid getting sick, school, time to spend outdoors, play, socialize, do homework, and to sit down for one meal a day together as a family (perhaps the single most protective thing you can do to keep their bodies and minds healthy). Once these activities are totaled, remaining time can be used for other experiences that interest the child, such as [activities like] Minecraft, Fortnite, etc. (2015)

John Duffy (2019) agrees that we all need to examine how much of our time we spend and waste on just social media. He suggests that families pick a day of the week to fully fast from social media to teach kids that most good things happen away from the digital world. Watch the video in QR Code 9.4 with your family members to start a discussion about what excessive media usage does to us personally as well as to our families and our society.



**QR Code 9.4 Can We Auto-Correct Humanity?**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRI8EIhrQjQ>

Michele Borba (2016) states, “It’s time to revive that parent admonishment, ‘Turn it off, and please look at me when I’m talking to you.’ And then make sure you’re applying the same rule to yourself” (p. 102). She’s right on target about how important it is for teachers and parents/guardians to model the media behavior they want to see in learners (who are always watching, listening, and learning). Adults making explanatory statements about their own actions can help kids internalize responsible choices.

## **Adult Explanatory Statements**

- “Excuse me for just a moment, I have to respond to this text from the school secretary. Then you will have my full attention.”
- “I know I’ve been on the computer a lot today, but this is part of my job, and my salary is important to maintaining our family’s welfare.”
- “While you students work on your group projects, I am going to take a moment to check the Internet for answers to the questions you just asked.”
- “It’s time to place your phones on the table and head to your rooms for reading or quiet time before bed. I’ll do the same an hour before I turn in for the night.”

- “The reason I did not weigh in on social media about the incident that happened at the game last night is that I found many of the comments were suppositions rather than facts, and the conversation went against our sensible use policy—is this post true, necessary, and helpful?”
- “Some of the people in our neighborhood are in a heated discussion on Facebook. People are starting to make personal attacks. At this point, I think the best thing for me to do is withdraw from the conversation and find something more positive to do with my time.”
- “I don’t know about you, but my eyes need a rest from screen time. Let’s all put our phones in the pocket holder on the door and look at each other as we do this next activity.”
- “It might seem funny to post that image now, but I have to remember that nothing on the web ever really goes away. I don’t think I want my name attached to that picture forever.” ●

Common Sense Education is a website developed with Harvard’s Project Zero. It offers lesson plans and helpful information for teachers and parent/guardians of students in grades K–12. It provides the most up-to-date research on digital use as well as excellent ideas and activities for helping students develop their self-efficacy about appropriate media use. You can find the link to Common Sense Education on our companion website: <http://resources.corwin.com/falldown7times>.

## Guidelines for Tweens and Teens

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Dr. John Duffy (2019) cautions that the transition period formerly called the “tween stage” (students around middle school age) is quickly disappearing. In his practice, he sees “children who are developmentally sprung from childhood into adolescence without the cushion of a couple of years to get accustomed to new thought patterns and behavioral draws” (p. 25).

Duffy explains to teachers and parents/guardians that it is impractical to compare our lives to those of today’s tweens and

teens. When we say things like, “Well, I remember what it was like when I was a teenager,” his response is “The truth is, you were never *this* teenager.”

Teenage concerns, free of the weight of social media “likes,” the pace of online chaos, the overarching academic pressures, and the wildly unreasonable body image demands, are artifacts of an era gone by. (p. 21)

He advises adults wrestling with the allure of social media with iGens to remember that none of this was their idea. “As far as [they are] concerned, it has always been this way” (p. 46).

Two things struck me when I read Duffy’s book. Number one was the statement that none of us were ever *this* teenager. I think it’s unfortunate, but it’s true. As parents and teachers/guardians we have to be aware that the digital world has brought all kinds of unique negative stress to tweens and teens already prone to compare themselves to others as they struggle for personal identity. Teens overwhelmingly choose Snapchat as their main social media site with Instagram and Facebook following close behind. Video apps like House Party allow them to create and follow social gatherings that create a new conundrum for them, FOMO (fear of missing out).

When I become exasperated with kids and their media obsession, I remind myself of Duffy’s second point—for this generation, it’s always been this way. They didn’t create it, and they didn’t ask for it. I remind myself that it is my job to help guide them through the same lessons of resiliency, self-efficacy, autonomy, and growth mindset I teach in other areas. I cannot and should not control every aspect of their experience with the digital world, but as Ana Homayoun pointed out, I can guide them and give them reasonable freedom and responsibility with “bumper lanes” when needed.

## **The Addictive Digital World**

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How much is too much when it comes to online participation? Megan Collins (2020) cites a pre-pandemic report that the average American teen spends approximately seven hours online per day. Add the online learning hours of virtual learning during COVID-19, and the total reaches over twelve hours

a day. The recent release of the Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma* has both teachers and parents/guardians questioning the inherently addictive characteristics of social media and its effects on teens.

What makes the digital world so addictive? Studies show that smartphones, social platforms, games, and apps are designed to trigger the release of dopamine (the happy drug) in the brain. Each sound, flash, or vibration promises the possibility of some kind of reward. Just as drugs, alcohol, gambling, smoking, and vaping activate a pleasure rush in the brain, digital devices and software programs are designed to hook users through intermittent gratification. Just as with drugs and alcohol, it soon takes more and more of the stimuli to obtain the same rush.

In her book, *#Look Up!* Judy Stoffel (2019) explores how Silicon Valley executives purposefully created a digital world that exploits personal data to control and manipulate users. Top executives as well as whistleblowers admit to sending digital designers to Las Vegas to study gaming in order to capitalize on its addictive properties. At the same time, top executives like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Evan Williams (founder of Twitter), and others admit they banned the use of iPads and other devices for their own children because they knew the potential addictive danger they posed.

On an NPR podcast about digital addiction, Stanford University psychiatrist and addiction specialist, Dr. Anna Lembke, points out that not all digital users become addicts. She says there is a spectrum of disorders. “There are mild, moderate and extreme forms. And for many people, there’s no problem at all.” Lembke notes that signs of problematic use include these:

- Interacting with the device keeps you up late or otherwise interferes with your sleep.
- It reduces the time you have to be with friends or family.
- It interferes with your ability to finish work or homework.
- It causes you to be rude, even subconsciously. “For instance,” Lembke asks, “are you in the middle of having a conversation with someone and just dropping down and scrolling through your phone?” That’s a bad sign.

- It's squelching your creativity. "I think that's really what people don't realize. Their smartphone usage can really deprive you of a kind of seamless flow of creative thought that generates from your own brain" (Lembke, as recorded by Martin & Doucleff, 2018).

For parents, the video available here in QR Code 9.5 is an illustrative interview about the addictive powers of digital devices:



QR Code 9.5 Author Judy Stoffel on Setting Screen Time Limits for Children

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4kQR3fHBnE>

## BREAKING THE ADDICTION

I don't want to sound like an alarmist when I write about potential addictive behavior with digital users. Personally, I really like my iPhone, my iPad, my computer, and my Internet connection. Writing this book is immensely easier with the important research I need just one click away. I like technology and what it has to offer me as a teacher and a learner. But I do think adults need to be aware of the potential harm it presents and take reasonable precautions to prepare students to exercise good judgement, self-regulation, and self-efficacy in the virtual world the same as in the real world. There are abundant resources to assist teachers and parents/guardians in helping kids navigate the precarious maze of the digital world.

Tristan Harris, a former Google executive, left the company in protest of what he saw as an unregulated and out-of-control industry. He went public with his *Ted Talk* and an interview on *60 Minutes* about how a handful of executives are controlling billions of minds. He is now a cofounder of The Center for Humane Technology (CHT), an organization that studies how technology hijacks our minds. The goal of CHT is to realign technology with humankind's best interest. You can find these resources and the link to their website on our companion website at <http://resources.corwin.com/falldown7times>.

Addiction involves craving for something intensely, loss of control over its use, and continuing involvement with it despite adverse consequences. Addiction changes the brain, first by

subverting the way it registers pleasure and then by corrupting other normal drives, such as learning and motivation. Although breaking an addiction is tough, it can be done. A proactive approach is always better than a reactive one, so let's look at how we can help kids avoid digital addiction in the first place. Following are some general guidelines I recommend to teachers and parents/guardians.

## ●●● HELPING KIDS AVOID ADDICTION

- Have a discussion about how digital devices, games, and apps are created to perpetuate addictive behavior. Ask kids to identify indicators in their programs that evidence intentional manipulation by the designer. Once they become aware of how they are being influenced, it is easier for them to resist the beeps and blinks.
- Look at the screen time function on their devices together and discuss the amount of time spent on various activities. Encourage them to keep a written record of how much time they spend on their devices and what they do during that time. Have a conversation about how their device use aligns with their goals and dreams.
- Have them write out a plan for all the things they have to do each day—school, chores, reading for pleasure, outdoor play, homework, practice, meals, bath/shower, sleep, and so forth, and attach times required for each activity. They can fill in the remaining time with preferred screen activities. Talk about the plan together and make any adjustments necessary. As much as possible, hold them to their plan.
- Ask them to turn alerts off and check their phones only at predetermined times.
- Declare a moratorium on device use at regular intervals. It can be for certain hours each day, for one day on the weekend, or something else. Pick times that work best for your family.
- Create a “Cinderella Rule” that indicates the time devices must be turned off and placed in a designated spot (away from its owner). It remains there until morning.

*(Continued)*



(Continued)

- Regularly talk with your learner in an open and ongoing discussion, free of lectures. Ask open-ended questions about issues they may well be struggling with that you are either unaware of or do not fully understand.
- Model the behavior (both digitally and otherwise) you want to see from your child.
- Stay informed about your child and maintain your precious connection with them.
- Don't forget to play! ●

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

**Figure 9.2**



Building and maintaining relationships with kids is uniquely supported with play. Whether it is a simple game of Catch, board games, cards, Corn Hole, basketball, touch football, Hide and Seek, Ping-Pong, or any number of activities, children flourish when adults engage with them in games. The problem is that our digitalized, hurry-up, workaholic, multi-tasking world offers little time for plain old-fashioned play, and that loss is costing us. It is bad enough that many adults today are glued to screens, but the fact that our offspring are following suit does not portend well.

A primary concern among authorities on iGen students (Lythcott-Haims, 2015; Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018; Stoffel, 2019) is their loss of important social emotional learning (SEL) skills associated with spending too much time in isolation with their personal devices. Kids carve out massive blocks of time for social media and video games but far less time for face-to-face interactions. A lot of learners are withdrawing from traditional kid-initiated activities (e.g., hanging out with friends, unstructured time outdoors, free play) in order to focus on digital media.

Peter Gray (2011) defines conventional *free play* as “activity that is freely chosen and directed by the participants and undertaken for its own sake, not consciously pursued to achieve ends that are distinct from the activity itself” (p. 426). Michele Borba (2016) laments, “The sad truth is that far too many kids are living play-deprived, hypercompetitive childhoods that diminish their chances to learn Rock, Paper, Scissors, “Be fair!” and “Do you want to play?” (p. 145).

Free play is important not only for SEL skill building but also for the development of essential neural pathways in the brain. Lukianoff and Haidt (2018) report that most mammals play a game similar to the children’s game of Tag. In species that are predators, such as wolves, their pups seem to prefer to be the chasers. In species that are prey, such as rats, the pups prefer to be chased. Play is essential for wiring a mammal’s brain to create a functioning adult. Mammals that are deprived of play won’t develop to their full capacity. The authors believe that children, like other mammals, need free play in order to finish the intricate wiring process of neural development. They also conclude, “Children deprived of free play are likely to be less competent—physically and socially—as adults. They are likely to be less tolerant of risk, and more prone to anxiety disorders” (p. 193).

Lythcott-Haims concurs. In *How to Raise an Adult*, she states that free play is a foundational element in the life of a developing child. She quotes Nancy Cotton's work (1984) about the benefits of play:

- Play provides the opportunity for children to learn, develop, and perfect new skills that build competence.
- Play is the child's natural mode to master anxiety from overwhelming experiences of everyday life, which builds the capacity to cope with the environment.
- Play helps build the ego's capacity to mediate between unconscious and conscious realities, which enhances ego strength.
- Play repeats or confirms a gratifying experience that fuels a child's investment in life (p. 160).

Stoffel (2019) adds,

It's no surprise that with increased smartphone usage comes a decrease in outside play. Tech time up, outdoor time down. In fact, the time children spend playing freely outside is down a whopping 50 percent! It's almost hard to believe the change has been so swift. It's a big loss for children since outdoor free play is a perfect environment for kids to practice social skills with their peers in an unstructured environment. While playing outside with other kids, they learn invaluable lessons, exercise their empathy muscles, learn to think creatively and not just linearly, and get the added bonus of physical exercise. (p. 79)

## TRY THIS

Take three minutes and watch the Nature Valley—3 Generations commercial at QR Code 9.6.



QR Code 9.6 3 Generations

<https://vimeo.com/133769368>

After you watch the video, answer these questions:

- To what extent do you think this video is an accurate depiction of childhood today?
- Do you think the children's descriptions of their online activities fall within the parameters of safe, healthy, and responsible use? Why or why not?
- What, if any, steps do adults need to take to ensure that kids get enough outdoor and free play time? ●

The digital world is here to stay. Our kids didn't ask for it, and for them, it has always been this way. Our job as teachers and parents/guardians is to help them learn to use devices to enhance their lives and build the self-regulation skills they need to ensure the digital world does not control their lives. One of the best ways we can do that is to act as good role models. We also need to have frequent and honest conversations with our offspring and our students about what they are doing online and how much time they spend doing it.

It is important to remember the ultimate goal in teaching and parenting is to guide children to become self-motivated, independent learners. As more and more digital tools are created by developers dedicated to luring potential customers, the best defense we have is to create informed consumers who have a sense of agency and purpose in choosing what and how they choose to spend their time and money.

Finding balance in the digital world is an extension of our overall goal to give every child a reasonable chance to succeed.



Finding balance in the digital world is an extension of our overall goal to give every child a reasonable chance to succeed. It may be that virtual reality complicates things in some ways, but hasn't being an effective parent, teacher, or guardian always been complicated by one challenge or another? We realize kids will make mistakes, and we also know that is part

of the growth process. We understand that it is hard to watch them fall down, but we trust we have taught them how to get up stronger. Fostering kids who become capable, determined, resilient life-long learners has never been easy, but it's the greatest gift we can give the next generation.

## ●●● REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 9—FINDING BALANCE WITH THE DIGITAL WORLD

1. Name differences you see in iGens that set them apart from millennials and prior generations. Think of both benefits and challenges.
2. What are your thoughts on multitasking regarding your own practices? What are your thoughts on multitasking regarding kids trying to do it? How do you think adults should approach the topic of multitasking with kids?
3. Have you had a discussion with your learner(s) about the influence of a cell phone even when it is not in current use? What would you say to them about what research says on that subject? Where do you keep your cell phone when you are not using it? Why?
4. At what age do you think most kids should get their own smart phone? Why? Judy Stoffel (2019) suggests that parents encourage children to think of their first phone as a loan of a family phone rather than calling it “my phone.” Do you think that is an important distinction to make? Why or why not?
5. Do you think it is a good idea to use “scare tactics” in warning kids about the dangers of the Internet? Why or why not? What other strategies might you use to help them make good choices regarding digital media?
6. What do you think Ana Homayoun (2017) means when she says we should guide our kids through decisions about digital media with freedom and responsibility but also use *bumper lanes*? Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. Make a rough draft of a family (or class) plan for a sensible use policy regarding digital media you would like to see enacted. Ask family (or class) members to do the same.
8. With your family or class, have a meeting and formulate requisite standards regarding digital media (along with consequences) for all members. ●