

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Connected Parenting Makes a Difference and Brain Health Matters- Part 1

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. As the Brain Health Initiative works to translate the science of brain health and performance into usable knowledge, this first of a two-part boost, we are looking at parenting in the digital age and today's post focuses on screen time and its impact on young people.

As parents, we worry about the amount of time our kids spend on their digital devices. Between social media, gaming, and online learning, teenagers are spending an average of nine hours a day online. The amount of screen time our kids are getting is also a concern for educators, pediatricians, policy makers, and lawmakers.

From a brain health perspective, it's not how long our children are in front of a screen that matters as much as what's happening in their brains as a response. [It can affect everything from sleep to creativity](#), suggests Pediatrician, Michael Rich, director of the [Center on Media and Child Health at Boston Children's Hospital](#). A young person's brain lacks a fully developed self-control system to help them with stop the lure of the reward system that virtually all games and social media are built on. Children need a diverse menu of online and offline experiences, including the chance to unplug and let their minds wander.

In the book "[The Connected Parent: An Expert Guide to Parenting in a Digital World](#)," authors Urs Gasser and John Palfrey recommend that we embrace the concept of "connected parenting" to make the most of digital technology and help our kids safely engage in the digital world.

Gasser, professor of practice at Harvard Law School and executive director of the [Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society](#) at Harvard, and Palfrey, president of the MacArthur Foundation, have been researching technology concerns for more than a decade. In an interview with [The Harvard Gazette](#) they recommend that in order to be connected parents, we have to make sure our kids know they can talk to us about — and ask about — anything. We also need to know what

we are talking about, so we need to be familiar with the apps they are using and the games we are playing.

“The connected parent has to learn new things all the time to keep track of technological developments and understand how their children are using technology, with its risks and possible benefits,” Dr. Gasser says in the article. “The very rapid pace of change creates a challenge for us parents because we have to make parental decisions without having the benefit of years of experience or advice from grandparents or evidence from researchers.”

The authors recommend letting data, not fear, drive our parenting. Our worries about the dangers of cyberspace can prevent us from being open to the positives of the digital world. Young people are learning and connecting to one another through these technologies. In addition to remote learning, young people are connecting and engaging online about topics such as civic activism and climate activism — two areas of interest to young people across the country and around the world.

Palfrey says engaging with our kids about technology is “literally necessary.” For our kids, there is no longer a difference between their online life and their offline life, it is just life.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO BOOST YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

The Brain Health Initiative supports these tips for being a connected parent from “[The Connected Parent: An Expert Guide to Parenting in a Digital World](#).”

- **Maintain an open line of communication.** Be open and willing to have a conversation with your kids about digital issues, and anything else.
- **Embrace the technology.** Learn about the apps and games they are playing. You don’t have to spend your day on TikTok, but be positive about new technology and build your skills so you can help mitigate risks.
- **Seek balance.** Be supportive, but allow your kids some independence.
- **Don’t fear new technologies.**
- **Engage with the technology yourself.** In order to remain credible and model good behavior, you need to engage. You may feel like you are constantly learning and readjusting, but it will help you support and empower your kids.
- And as always, remember to **BE BRAIN HEALTHY. Adopt a Brain Healthy Lifestyle**, including thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote:
 - Stress resilience
 - Nutrition
 - Physical activity
 - Sleep
 - Social connection
 - Emotional wellbeing
 - Meaning and Purpose
 - Cognitive stimulation and creativity
 - Engaging with nature

- General health
- Positive impacts

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to protecting brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is a collaborative effort with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, and the Academy for Brain Health and Performance to build brain healthy communities through education, collaboration, research, innovation, and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early detection, evidence-based intervention and optimization of performance*. The BHI is creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the brain health movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).