

## Tech Unplugged - February 2015

It may seem counter-intuitive for the Rosemont School Director of Technology to tell you to close that laptop and put down the iPad, but that is just what I am about to do. As much as I love technology - all the shiny devices, cool apps and glittering gadgets - I am a big fan of Benjamin Franklin and his admonition, "In all things moderation." Many students are surprised to find that I enjoy needlework, gardening, and hiking as much as I love the new Surface Pro! There is a time for technology and a time to unplug.

Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of great reasons for our students (and your children and grandchildren) to use technology in their academic and personal lives. The opportunities for exploration, collaboration, and connection are boundless. Technology can be an outstanding outlet for creativity and imagination. Students are living, and will be working, in a techno-centric world and we can neither ignore that nor under-prepare them.

Our challenge is to help our students figure out how best to live in that world and when to disconnect. At Rosemont School we spend a good deal of time helping students be ethical, safe, and smart users of technology and the Internet. We do not want them to be invisible on the web - just positively and safely visible.

When I speak with Middle School students I tell them that in five or six years, when I Google one of them, I DO want to have them come up in my search results. But I want to see the *awesome* them - a great essay they wrote or a photo of them doing community service, not the *less-than-terrific* them - photos of inappropriate behavior at a dance or mean comments that they posted on someone's news feed.

But this post isn't really about Internet safety or cyber-bullying; it is about finding balance in our lives. It is about looking up, looking around, and interacting with the world around us. So, how do we achieve this Nirvana? That, dear readers, is the million-dollar question in our over-connected lives.

I do not pretend to have the ultimate answer but I do have some basic tips:

- Limits on screen time can be effective for younger children - experts suggests no more than two hours a day. However, this may not be practical for older children who often have academic requirements for screen time. So why not work toward screen-free goals instead? So instead of "we will limit our screen time to two hours today," how about, "we will spend at least two hours with our cell phones out of sight today."
- Establish tech-free zones. As far as I am concerned, all dining room and kitchen tables, bedrooms, and bathrooms (yes, bathrooms!) should be tech-free zones. There are more important things to be done in those spaces!
- Short car rides should also be considered screen-free/tech-free times. You have a captive audience! Take the opportunity to talk to each other, play a game, or sing a

song. Simply listen to your children talk to each other - you will be amazed at what you can learn!

This is my take on the topic, and all families will have to create their own boundaries. While it may not be easy to do so, the boundaries need to be set.

As teachers and parents, it is our responsibility to not only establish healthy patterns of tech use but also to model them. The serial violator of the “no tech at the table” rule at my house is actually an adult over 40! You may or may not know that I sit in the mezzanine of the gym during the Christmas Program each year so that I can record the program for the music teachers to review later. From that vantage point I can see all of the parent mobile devices that are in use. Unfortunately, most of them are not capturing the event - they are being used to check text messages and emails. Luckily, most of the kids cannot see what I see. And, by the way, I know for a fact that this situation is not unique to our parent population. Years-end is a crazy time and it is understandably hard to disconnect but we have to stop and ask ourselves what is most important in this moment. I am not saying this is easy; just that it is important.

This month we will have a Tech Down Week, a student-led initiative, where faculty and students will be asked to limit their use of technology in a very specific way. Why not take the opportunity to talk to your child about this and perhaps participate as a family? Better yet, why not make it a part of your family’s Lenten activities?