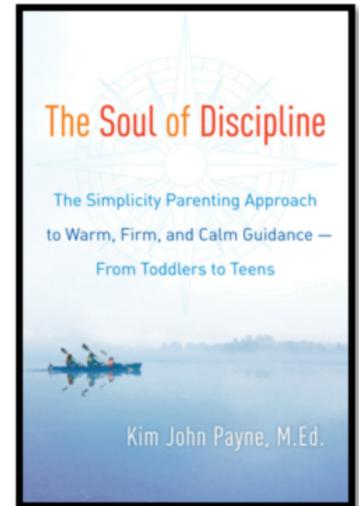


Ten Ways to Avoid Screen Distracted Parenting.

By Kim John Payne.

An extract from *The Soul of Discipline: The Simplicity Parenting Approach to Warm, Firm and Calm Guidance. From Toddlers to Teens* (Ballantine Books/Penguin Random House. 2015.)



There is still hope in this otherwise unhealthy interpersonal dynamic. Since we are the ones who kick-started this cycle by withdrawing too much of our attention from our children, we have the power to change it. The tricky part? We have to be conscious and courageous enough to stand up to the new normal: the highly *distracted* parent.



No big announcement needed. Nor should we douse ourselves in *mea culpa*. We just need to do it, to place our connection with our family well above our connection to screens.

Here are some strategies that parents have found very helpful.

- 1. Anticipate:** If you are expecting an important message, tell your child ahead of time. Let her know you don't like breaking away and that this is an exception.
- 2. Plan B:** If you suspect you may need to take a call when you are with your child, set him up with a simple activity while you are engaged. Try to make the call brief by agreeing on a better time to chat or email back. Tell your child that if he doesn't interrupt your call, it will go even more quickly.
- 3. "Thank you":** Give a child a quick and simple affirmation for waiting: "Thank you, Jenny, it's not easy to wait and you really helped Mommy a lot."
- 4. Respect the call:** Briefly tell your caller or texter, "Great to hear from you. I really want to focus on this. But I'm with my kids right now. I'll call you back in XX minutes." This demonstrates respect for both your caller and your kids.

5. Post-call re-connect: Make it a family habit to do something nice with your child after you've interrupted your time together. It doesn't have to be anything grand. Just a little cuddle or comment about the way his picture is turning out or how her jump shot is really improving.

6. Glance and return: If you cannot unplug completely, allow yourself to glance at an incoming message. But unless someone's reporting that his "hair is on fire" tell your child, "It can wait until later." This way you not only keep track of your messages but also communicate clearly that you are not pulling away from her.

7. Sneak Checks: Before checking your phone, make sure your kids are thoroughly engaged in an activity—and unlikely to need your help—or otherwise entertained by your partner or friends.

8. Phone-free times: Decide on certain times of the day when unbroken time with your child is paramount and shut your phone down completely: perhaps after school check in; homework time; meals; and/or bedtime. Commit fully. No quiet ring or vibrate alert. Just turn the device off. Some moms and dads give their friends and colleagues a heads up about phone-free family time. Others specify their whereabouts on their voicemail greetings. One example: "Hi. You have reached Lesley's voicemail. If you are ringing during office hours I am probably in a meeting. If you're calling after hours I am likely with my kids. Either way I will call you back as soon as I can." One mom who did this was told by a number of people that they really liked the being "with my kids" part of her greeting, and that they were going to do the same on their voicemail message.

9. Don't even look: If the phone rings or vibrates say out loud, to your child, "Oh. That can wait."

10. Include your kids: If your child has his own phone, make sure to set clear boundaries about its use. He should know to put it away when the family has company, and particularly when he is spending time with you. This will be a lot easier if you are both following similar guidelines.

