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Happy Mother's Day



MAY 2018

Technology Use

Parents Must Manage Their Children's Technology Use

by Dr. Kate Roberts, PhD

One of the most challenging parenting responsibilities today is managing a child's technology use. Even young children who don't feel peer pressure are mesmerized by technology and older children want to use technology to interact, often making their tech use seem like a lifeline that parents are conflicted about cutting off.

A new video game has increased the potential for technology addiction in children and teens. The game is *Fortnite*. *Fortnite* is an interactive video game of survival that invites players to create squads to outwit and outlive other squads. *Fortnite* is different from other games in that players play in squads with their friends and try to outsmart their rivals or just other friends playing in other squads. The game has become a



favorite way for preteens and teens to socialize with peers. Some parents may want to believe that this is great because gaming is now paired with a social experience. While the social element of playing in a squad and conversing about strategy is present,

Fortnite is not a replacement for non-technology social time. Social interactions need to occur in real life in order to promote positive social skills, empathy, listening skills and reciprocal interactions. Parents have complained how difficult it is to get their kids off the game and back to reality. And parents are not the only adults concerned about *Fortnite*. Girlfriends of adult male *Fortnite* gamers have started a petition to ban the game.

Technology, including *Fortnite*, is addictive. All video games are addictive and thus, video games need to be played in moderation. It's not only *Fortnite* that is addictive. Many tech users get anxious, depressed or worried without technology. People who rely on technology to make themselves feel connected report that they feel empty or fearful without it. For teen girls, this often comes in the form of texting and heavy social media use by posting to see how many reactions they can get to determine how popular they are at any given moment. It's very fleeting and not a healthy way for someone to judge their value to others. Adults, too, have anxiety when they are away from

their cell phones and social media, fearing something important will happen that they will miss. When this fear becomes so large it causes worry, these people have lost touch with reality. They have lost perspective. In reality, anything really important to them will occur in real life, outside of technology. They have forgotten that connection is about actually being with people and spending quality time together, not tweets and texts.

It's my strong belief that parents need to connect more with each other about their children's technology use. Teens are spinning up tales in order to use tech more, such as telling parents that all their friends can game at least 2 hours a day after doing homework. Although it's work for parents to get input from other parents in their child's friend group, it may be easier to know what you are up against than continue to argue in the dark.



Dialogue between parents regarding excessive gaming or social media use will help parents feel less alone and more supported when they have to be tough on tech use with their children. It's difficult to constantly battle against excessive tech use and yet it's essential if you are a responsible parent today. One scenario is for parents, whose children are in the same friend group, to use a unified approach to managing gaming and/or social media and set similar expectations for their teens. This sends a consistent message

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The Gift of Education

Are Your Children's Tuition Bills Looming? Feel the *HEET!*

by Mark Tuttle, Esquire

A great way to pay for your children's education is to not pay it at all. Grandparents or other family members or friends can make immediate gifts to children in order to pay for their educational expenses. The annual gift tax exclusion by a donor to a donee is \$14,000 in 2017 and \$15,000 in 2018. As an example, grandma and grandpa could each donate \$14,000 to one child in 2017 for a total gift of \$28,000 without incurring gift tax. The grandparents might adjust the balance sheet of the hotchpot to reflect the fact that, upon their death, the parents of the grandchildren would get \$28,000 less. For grandparents with substantial assets, grandparents who want to avoid the low, one-million dollar threshold for Massachusetts estate tax, or grandparents who wish to spend down their assets in order to qualify for Medicaid, this type of giving can be an important part of estate planning.

If a donor has reached the limit of his or her gift exemption, know that tuition payments made directly to an educational organization on behalf of another person are not treated as taxable gifts. (This is also true of medical payments made by the donor directly to a medical provider on behalf of a donee.) The education expense exclusion is limited to tuition. It does not cover books,

supplies, room and board or similar expenses. However, if the educational institution is a boarding school which does not differentiate from its tuition and room and board, the full fee charged qualifies for the exclusion. The payment must be made directly to an educational organization which normally maintains a regular faculty and curriculum and has a regularly enrolled body of students in attendance at the place where the educational activities are being carried on. Primary, secondary, preparatory schools, high schools and colleges and universities are all considered "educational organizations". Nursery, pre-schools and other instructional areas can be considered "educational organizations", so long as they meet certain guidance provided by IRS revenue rulings.

Checks must be made payable directly to the educational institution in order



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North Shore Children & Families



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Designed by Group One Graphics
Printed by Seacoast Media Group

Please see page 3
for our upcoming deadlines.

Published and distributed monthly throughout the
North Shore, 10x per year, and always online.

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AT SHORE COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL

Managing Technology

Continued from page 2

across the friend group. Ideally, the message for teens should be moderation is fine, but excessive tech use leads to addiction and addiction is dangerous.

I developed a Facebook page, www.facebook.com/groups/parentsmanagingtechnology, as a venue for communication between concerned parents. This may be a starting off point for some parents, especially those who are not comfortable attempting to connect with other friend group parents about tech management. Joining a Facebook group of parents with similar concerns may

offer parents needed support without having to put other parents on the spot.

Bottom line is, teens and children and even adults need rules regarding technology regulation. If your teen is unable to respect your rules, you really should not give up. It may take more work, but all teens can recover from tech addiction with the correct approach. Get professional help sooner rather than later if you are concerned about your teen's tech use. Having your teen listen and follow your rules may be the perfect Mother's Day gift to you. Here's wishing all North Shore mothers a very happy Mother's Day!

Dr. Kate Roberts is a clinical and school psychologist on the North Shore. www.drkateroberts.com, www.facebook.com/groups/parentsmanagingtechnology.

Tuition Bills Looming?

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to qualify for the exclusion from gift tax. If the administrative challenges of having a grandparent pay the educational institution directly create an undue burden, the grandparent can create an account in the grandparent's name for each child and give the child check-writing authority. It is also possible for the donor to prepay tuition expenses as long as such payments are not entitled to be refunded.

Gifts paid directly to the provider to pay tuition or medical expenses of a person are also exempt from generation skipping tax (GST). The exclusion from GST applies to payment from trusts as well as payments made by an individual. Therefore, if there is a trust not exempt from GST that has skip persons as beneficiaries, the trustee can make tuition or medical payments on behalf of the skip persons without incurring GST. The availability of this exclusion has led to the development of the *Health and Educational Exclusion Trust* or *HEET*. The *HEET* is an irrevocable trust funded for the purpose of providing for the direct payment of tuition and medical expenses for grandchildren and more remote descendants.

If you are uncertain how you can pay for your children's tuition, talk to their grandparents about the generous exclusions from gift tax and GST. An annual gift, a one-time gift of pre-paid tuition or the establishment of a *HEET* by your children's grandparents would unburden your balance sheet and help your parents spend down their assets while meeting the important estate planning goal of providing for future generations.

Mark Tuttle is a practicing attorney with offices in Salem, MA – Tuttle Trust & Fiduciary Services, LLC. He specializes in Estate and Business Planning; Wills and Trusts; and Divorce Mediation. Mark can be reached at mark@tuttlefs.com or 978.548.7662. www.tuttlefs.com

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Teaching Kids to Give Brings Happiness, Healing and Purpose

by Leah Okimoto, Founder/Executive Director

One of the things we try to inspire children to do is to think of the totality of their lives and selves as unique gifts to the world. This includes their personalities, interests, life experiences – happy as well as difficult – family backgrounds and history, and so on. We believe that every child can give and contribute to others' lives in a way that no one else on the planet can, and that their unique gifts don't have to fit into a certain mold or always look like the set of activities we tend to label as "community service". Given this freedom to bring joy, help and enrichment, and to uplift in any form that excites them, many of our 800 young participants have chosen to teach or share something they love and have experience doing with others. Because of their youthful passion, they are uniquely able to get others excited about subjects they might not otherwise have thought of learning or trying. We thought we'd share a few terrific examples from the past few weeks with you.



8th graders Darian, Jeffrey, Ryan and Xerxis have been participating in robotics competitions through their school and on their own for the past 2 years. It's something they have enjoyed, but after this year's competition, they realized that they wouldn't need the kit anymore. They came to us asking if we knew of a school that could

use the kit if donated. We said, "Of course!" And the more we talked, the idea came up for them to also lead an introductory workshop for students to teach them some basics and also get them excited about learning about robotics and working with the kit. We connected with the *Lawrence Family Development Charter School*, and they loved the idea. The boys met on their own time to plan the session, and then the day of, they led the workshop for 2 hours for a dozen 6th graders. By the time it was over, their students had a great time and seemed pumped about staying involved with the newly forming robotics club after school!

8th grader, Pedro, loves to read, especially science fiction novels. At recess, he can be spotted standing and reading a book. He wasn't sure he wanted to do an Aaron's Presents project, but as we got acquainted and started chatting, he realized that he might be able to inspire other kids to read. So he recruited

his friends, Jeremy and Angel, to help him put together a list of their favorite books to create a lending library for their grade. They are going to add to it as they read other books that they like. They put stickers in each of the books and signed them all, so they will leave behind a tangible legacy for future students after they graduate middle school in May! They also have plans to be reading buddies for 1st graders next month.



And last but not least, 3rd graders Liam, Luke and Noah have taken their love of sports and created something benefiting little kids and their parents for the 3rd year in a row! They call their sports activity, "Games to Make a Difference", and open it up to any kids ages 3-8. Coach Michelle Doucette of *Get Youth Moving* and *AP Sports* indoor turf



facility donated their help once again this year and the boys shepherded 18 kids through various fun sports games, introducing them to skills used in soccer, hockey and lacrosse. Because of their role-modeling and kind encouragement and energy, they were able to keep all the kids excited and moving for an hour and a half!

Through the simple act of sharing their passions, kids are learning that they can give and bring joy in unique ways because of who they are and what they know. They also start to appreciate the opportunities and exposure they have had to various activities, classes, lessons, etc. and learn that this sharing is one of the other purposes of developing themselves. We always tell them, as we encourage them to take every opportunity and try hard in school, "The more you learn, the more you know, the more you can do...the more you can give".

Please visit www.aaronspresents.org to learn more about what our organization offers and how a child you know can apply to participate.

Leah Okimoto is the Executive Director of Aaron's Presents, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that she founded in 2014 in memory of her infant son, Aaron. Feel free to contact: Leah at lokimoto@aaronspresents.org or (978)809-5487; Kimberly LaBonte-Kay, North Shore Regional Director, at kimberly@aaronspresents.org or (978)886-6312; Ebony White, Lynn Project Mentor, at ebony@aaronspresents.org or (978)886-6257; Kate Adams, Lawrence Project Mentor, at kadams@aaronspresents.org or (978)886-6076; or Nana Younge, Lowell Project Mentor, at nana@aaronspresents.org or (978)886-9965.

Shore Country Day School

Making Space for Social & Emotional Learning in the Classroom

As news reports echo with disturbing accounts from survivors of school violence, and as pressing education issues such as bullying and student anxiety keep parents and educators on high alert about how well schools are caring for children, the concept known as “social and emotional learning” has become ever more central in discussions about student well-being and success.

Many education researchers have come to see social and emotional learning as a key that unlocks solutions to a host of challenges. Through programs that emphasize traits such as self-awareness, relationship-building, decision-making, and resilience, social and emotional learning is proving a robust toolkit for increasing academic achievement; nurturing prosocial behaviors such as kindness, sharing, and empathy; improving student attitudes toward school; and even reducing depression and stress.

At Shore Country Day School, the high stakes around this kind of learning have underscored a decades-long commitment to creating and sustaining a culture in which students feel safe and may thrive. The complexities of maintaining such a culture, however, can sometimes be difficult to grasp. According to Lower School Head Sara Knox, this is at least in part because Shore’s comprehensive and very deliberate focus on social and emotional learning appears, to many visitors, as simply the “natural” caring instincts and intuitive classroom practices of highly skilled Upper and Lower School teachers. But creating a culture in which students’ well-being is genuinely a priority, says Knox, is anything but a happy accident of a caring culture and expert teachers.

In the Lower School, building such an environment starts in the homeroom, where social and emotional learning are at the center of every day’s routine, thoroughly integrated into a teaching model called “Responsive Classroom.” According to Knox, “This model gives us a set of shared practices to ensure all our students feel safe and feel they have a voice.” In the Responsive Classroom model, students learn and practice a set of social and emotional competencies—cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self control—alongside academic skills; the



combination allows them to do their best work, and be their best selves.

Step into any given Lower School classroom, and this philosophy is immediately apparent in the Morning Meeting, says Knox; the Morning Meeting—like its end-of-day corollary, Closing Circle—plays both a practical and a social-emotional role. “Morning Meeting gives our teachers the opportunity to talk about the day, and it also allows time to go through community-building activities that emphasize those social-emotional aptitudes.” The classroom culture these moments create is one of the primary ways Shore ensures that no one “falls through the cracks,” Knox says.

In sixth grade, students move to Shore’s Upper School, graduating from the Lower School’s homeroom model to an advisory system. There, though students travel between multiple teachers for their primary subjects, they meet numerous times each week with an advisor, who in many ways serves the same role as a homeroom teacher.

Sean Melia, Dean of Students and sixth grade English teacher, explains, “The advisor is something like a shepherd, guiding their small group of advisees through the year.” Students’ access to an advisor’s support is built into the academic schedule throughout the week. Each day during what’s called “Eighth Hour”—an open half-hour

period at the end of the daily class schedule—students visit their advisor for what can be anything from a brief check-in to a longer conversation about a specific concern. Wednesdays, advisee groups share informal conversation over lunch with their advisor, and every Thursday during a dedicated advisory period, more formal sessions on specific topics are convened.

“If there’s one trend I’ve noticed over the past few years,” acknowledges School Counselor Katie Hertz, “it’s that teachers are now on the ‘front lines’ with regard to kids’ concerns, and they really see it as part of their job to be aware of and help address whatever those may be.” Particularly in the Upper School, Hertz notes, “Students are increasingly coming in the door very aware of what’s happening in the world, whether it’s school shootings or the ‘#metoo’ movement.”

As Dean of Students Sean Melia explains, this is precisely why children’s social and emotional needs are such a central piece of the learning they’re engaged in at Shore each day. “I remember what a completely different time elementary and middle school can be,” he observes, “and what a great time, too. Like all of my colleagues, I have to keep reminding myself to take a step back, and to consider that these kids have a tremendous need for the understanding and support that I can give them. As a school, this is what we are all engaged in: the difficult but incredibly gratifying project of understanding children, and demonstrating that understanding to them each day.”

The information contained in this education feature was submitted by Shore Country Day School, and published in partnership with North Shore Children & Families; www.northshorefamilies.com.