



## Family Time

by Sue Yockey, Elementary School Counselor

The priests at the Church I attend have been reflecting on the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching and sharing insights in their homilies as they relate to the Sunday readings. This article sprouted as I listened and reflected on the second principle entitled "Call to Family, Community, and Participation." A family is one or more living beings who share a commonality of inhabitation. It takes no effort to be a member of a family when defined this way. One just needs to be living with another. Community is a group of families. It takes a little bit of action to become a community as it involves movement of families together. For example, when a family registers for and its child or children begin attending Valley Catholic School their family becomes part of the Valley Catholic community. The noun I want to emphasize from the second principle is "Participation," the act of taking part in something. When one participates he or she becomes a contributing member of the group. This is what truly requires effort.

Teachers often ask their students for class participation. What about "family participation?" There is a commitment required from family members when responding to a request to take part in their household. It means that for a designated amount of time, technology will be put down, television will be shut off, and anything that takes one away from the family will be postponed. This would create the space for quality time for everyone in the family. This valuable time involves listening, sharing, agreeing to disagree at times, being present, communicating thoughts and feelings, and enjoying the presence of God in each other.

- Here are a few tips to consider, but remember the more the family's members are able to contribute to the structure, the better the time together will likely be.
- Start slowly, perhaps one night, afternoon, or morning a week.
- Begin in gratitude for the time together with a prayer, song, poem, or short reading. It can be different each gathering or the same each time.
- Have an activity, discussion, or topic of family interest planned.
- End with each member sharing something positive about the experience. Affirm all responses with a thank you.
- Notice body language for those hesitant to share, for example, "I noticed a smile when your brother shared" or "you stayed with us the whole time and looked at each person when he/she spoke."
- Before dismissing everyone extend your gratitude to the whole family for taking part in the discussion, activity, or conversation on a family topic.

Family participation strengthens the bond between members. It involves acceptance, respect, love, trust, gratitude, and forgiveness. It is a chance for the family to practice exemplifying to each other the values they hold. In the Bible it says, "For where two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Remember this as you come together for family time. Accept the call to "Family, Community, and Participation," and begin the journey of contribution, one gathering at a time. "Together you will do great things!"

# There's No Time Like Screen Time

by Sr. Colleen Schmitt, Middle School Counselor

How much time are we spending with screened devices? If you start to add up the parts of our day when we are in front of our computer, kindle, iPhone, TV and other devices, we find that the average American could spend up to 8 to 10 hours in front of a screen. According to the American College of Pediatricians, teens spend more than 10 hours per day on a screened device. Our work and school day has naturally adapted to new technologies. Thus it is important to recognize how electronic devices have benefitted our lives as well as pay attention to the potential risks that such advancement may produce.

First the positives. Not too many of us can argue that computers and other electronics used at work have increased our communication ability, productivity, and creativity. Think spreadsheets, documents, emails, webinars, publishing and skype meetings (among others). Many schools, including ours, have maximized the benefit of screened electronics by using an iPad, google classroom, digital learning, podcasts, and YouTube for educational instruction as well as emails and websites for communication and information. Throughout our work and school day, we are fortunate to be able to produce work, communicate and network with colleagues, create art and music, and gather new information by staying on top of current events—all with the help from a screen.

Additionally, many of us stay connected with family and friends via text, facetime, Instagram, Facebook, and many other social media outlets. We are able to share photos, stories, opinions, and other happenings with several people at once—staying engaged and obtaining support. We are also entertained by television, movies, eBooks, radio stations...more and more we are finding our entertainment either provided by or suggested by a screened device. Even our magazine subscriptions have started to include an app in order to provide easy access as well as to save paper by being eco-friendly. The list of benefits for screened devices is not exhaustive. To many of us, we are living in a great electronic age!

But before we text each other a high five, we need to consider the less than positive effects of prolonged screen time. Staying cued-in to some of these effects may help us pay attention to and adjust our own patterns of use. First is the significant increase to the risk of obesity. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the risk of obesity is found in those who watch more than two hours of TV or other screened devices per day and are sedentary. Considering that our average screen time is 8 – 10 hours, there are not too many of us who are not at risk. We know that the fallout from obesity and being sedentary leads to several other health risks. Thus, consciously monitoring our screen time and increasing our physical activity is imperative for improved health.

Another health risk that is often overlooked is vision stress. Prolonged exposure to screens (more than two hours at one time) can cause digital eyestrain, dry eyes, headache, blurred vision, or neck and shoulder pain. The Vision Council reports that sustained exposure to blue light or high energy visible light (HEV) found in screened devices could lead to retinal damage and vision problems. In addition, the blue light from our screens used before going to bed suppresses melatonin, which then send signals to our body to stay awake. Poor sleep and vision stress can lead to negative impacts to our work or school day. To help with digital eye strain doctors recommend the 20-20-20 rule when working or playing on screened devices for extended periods of time: Every 20 minutes look away at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds or more. More recommendations for how to handle eye strain can be found here: <https://www.thevisioncouncil.org/content/blue-light-exposure-and-digital-eye-strain>

Health risks are not the only factor to consider with prolonged screen time. Social and emotional risks should also be considered. The time we spend in front of a screen could impact other aspects of our lives that no longer receive the time they require. Homework is delayed because of a videogame. Family time is replaced with connecting with friends online. Television viewing in place of one-on-one interaction, etc. Similarly, the type of content we choose to view, listen to, or take part in (i.e. media use) could be harmful, could compromise our safety or identity, and might lead to legal problems. These risks could negatively impact our relationships, work productivity, and mental health. For more information on media use visit: <https://www.common sense media.org/educators/parents>.

The risks of screen time should not outweigh the keen benefits to our lives that screened devices provide. Yet in order to stay ahead of the risks, doctors recommend incorporating screen time guidelines which encourage us to:

- Fill out an individualized Media Use Plan ([www.healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan](http://www.healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan)) to assign screen-free zones, device curfews, and other guidelines for the family.
- Talk to your family about physical activity, nutrition, sleep hygiene, and the effects of prolonged screen time.
- Limit screen use especially during family time.
- Track how much time your family spends in front of a screen versus how much physical activity they get.
- Create screen-free bedrooms to prevent family isolation and to improve sleep.
- Turn off screens during meals.
- Keep the computer in a common area.
- Create alternative hobbies that do not involve screens.
- Treat entertainment screen time as a privilege after chores and homework.
- Spend screen time together to share and to ensure that content is appropriate.
- Use screening tools to block inappropriate access.
- Learn about internet and social media safety and establish safety rules with your family.

The list of the above recommendations is just a sampling of ideas that encourages a healthy and reasonable strategy to daily screen use. Realistically, screened devices are here to stay. Not only has our society embraced this technology but we continue to find creative ways to use and expand its potential. The use of iPads in the Middle School, for example, shows our willingness to stay connected with current technology and prepare our students for what lies ahead. We must therefore stay current on the risks to current technology and the recommendations of experts regarding prolonged screen use. Practicing “screen time hygiene” is one way to stay healthy and aware without staying behind the times.

## **References**

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## **Failure: It’s Just a Word**

by Shelby Treick, High School Counselor

*“Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour, not a dead end. Failure is something we can avoid only by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing.” - Denis Waitley*

When we think of failure, we think of it as a life-changing catastrophe from which we can never return. Our fear of failure leaves us crippled well before the challenge has taken place; our students are not immune to these feelings. From their rigorous academic load, to their countless hours of extracurricular activities, our students are not only being groomed for college success; they are consistently facing challenges, which in turn means they are consistently staring failure in the face. This isn’t a bad thing. On the contrary, what a wonderful gift they’re receiving: opportunities to try and possibly fail, grow, then try again and succeed. One can only fail if they allow themselves to see it as a catastrophe. Victor Frankl, author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*, describes pain and suffering as “hidden opportunities for achievement.”

At Valley Catholic we ask our students for so much, we challenge them spiritually and mentally every day and for what? So that they can leave here stronger than yesterday with the courage to take on any challenge without the fear to fail. It's only in times of struggle that we begin to discover what we are made of. A negative test score this week has no impact on next week's test, unless we let it.

I am asking you to put your children in positions to possibly fail. I am asking you to not let your children succumb to the fear of failure. Instead, let's look at failure as an opportunity for growth.

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