6 ways parents can help kids strike a balance between screen time and the real world

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When it comes to kids and screens, it often feels as though parents are wearing headphones with conflicting messages piped into each ear. On one side: a steady drumbeat of increasingly dire warnings about game addictions and the developmental consequences of letting kids spend too much time on devices. On the other side: the powerful siren song of phones, laptops, tablets and video games. Our kids are constantly nagging us for access — more time for playing games, doing homework, catching up with friends or watching endless hours of YouTube.

As with everything, it's up to parents to find balance. We need to figure out where the line is between what is necessary, or at least acceptable, and what is too much. Although there are general guidelines on how to set those limits, the answer will vary from family to family, and even from one child to another within a family, says David Hill, a pediatrician and father of five in Chapel Hill, N.C.

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"A lot of parents seem to feel great difficulty with saying no to their kids," says Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, a professor of education, psychology, linguistics and cognitive science at the University of Delaware and the author of "Becoming Brilliant." She suggests taking a page from former first lady Nancy Reagan's anti-drug campaign.