

Pointers For Parents

Screen Time Is Here To Stay!

(NAPS)—*Halle Stanford, President of Television at The Jim Henson Company and mother to two boys, ages 19 and 6, shares her views on navigating the kids' TV landscape.*

As a producer at The Jim Henson Company and a mom to two boys, I have a unique perspective on screen time. I've also explored this issue in one of my shows, *Dot*. This animated preschool series created by the fabulous Randi Zuckerberg addresses how technology can enhance a kid's everyday adventures. We were lucky to be advised by Yalda Uhls (author of *Media Moms and Digital Dads*) on creating a show curriculum that encourages kids and their families to be excellent digital citizens, to come up with a family media agreement, and to talk openly about screen time.

My personal philosophy on this issue is simple: Viva la screen time! I encourage my kids to enjoy movies, television, videos, apps, and more. Like my hero Jim Henson, I believe in the positive transformative power of media. As a producer, my goal has always been to create television and films that enrich, educate, and entertain. So I have always encouraged my boys to love the shows and games that they are drawn to, but also to discover programming that informs them on issues and ideas they are curious about. Favorites in our house range from *Phineas and Ferb*, *Sarah and Duck*, *Reading Rainbow Skybrary*, *Despicable Me*, *Star Wars to Westworld*, *Nathan For You*, *Game Of Thrones*, and *The Walking Dead*. (Remember, my boys are 13 years apart!)

As a momma, how much screen time do I let my youngest have? It has changed with his age and often depends on what's happening that day. In the summer, he's allowed screen time in the morning AND in the afternoon, but it's more limited during the school year. True confession: I don't have a set amount of time he always gets, but it's usually no longer than an hour. And we do talk about how long he'll be watching the shows before he settles in to viewing. And when that last show starts, he gets a



Jim Henson's Family Hub is the home to some of television's favorite preschool stars. © Henson.

reminder that his screen time is almost up. Yes, there have been times when he grabs the phone or remote when screen time is over and runs around the house laughing, but I'm as quick as a cheetah.

My 19-year-old is an adult and at this point in his life, I trust him to regulate his own screen time. And still, the best I can do for both my boys is to model good screen time habits myself. When we are together, I do my best to use my phone only to snap those memorable photos or answer an urgent message. And I tell them why I am taking the time to focus on my screen and not on them. I also never answer the phone during meals or playtime. But, once they're asleep or out and about, I love having my own time to turn on my latest favorite show (hello, *Outlander*!).

We are in a new golden age of television and I would embolden parents to find shows that will delight and inspire their kids. It will take time (because there is so much content out there), but get involved with customizing your family's viewing experiences together—it's FUN! (And, if it happens to be *Dot*, *Splash and Bubbles*, *Dinosaur Train*, *Doozers*, *Word Party*, or *Julie's Greenroom*...even better!).

Discover your child's next favorite show. Visit www.JimHensonsFamilyHub.com to explore The Jim Henson Company's award-winning programs for all ages.