Danger of raising 'glow kids'

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A recent article in the *New York Post* focused on the potential harm caused to our children by electronic devices. So many school systems are equating student achievement with digital access. E-devices are viewed as essential items in the classroom and at home. But what is their impact on child development?

The *Post* story highlights a mother who bought her young son an iPad thinking, "Why not let him get a jump on things?" The school raved about their educational benefits. But her foray into the electronic world ended with an addiction to the game Minecraft, a loss of interest in his usual activities like baseball, and boredom when he wasn't plugged in. Unfortunately, these outcomes are not rare.

The *Post* article describes recent brain imaging research that shows how e-devices affect the frontal cortex the same way that some drugs do. "Clinical studies show that screens increase depression, anxiety, and aggression and can even lead to psychotic-like features where the video gamer loses touch with reality." This is what eventually happened to the boy in the *Post* story.

The article was written by Dr. Nicholas Kardaras, psychotherapist and addiction treatment specialist. He is author of the book "Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction is Hijacking Our Kids – and How to Break the Trance" (St. Martin's).

Dr. Kardaras says, "Once a kid has crossed the line into true tech addiction, treatment can be very difficult. Indeed, I have found it easier to treat heroin and crystal meth addicts than lost-in-the-matrix video gamers or Facebook-dependent social media addicts."

Maintaining balance

We know that kids spend many hours on digital devices. Some will develop a tech addiction, many will not. What makes the difference? And how do you provide your children the advantage of digital access while ensuring they maintain a healthy outlook and a balanced life?

Parents have an important role to play and we think it begins with emphasizing alternatives. Help your child discover the value of books, the importance of manual toys and the fun of in-person activities like sports and the arts.

Limit time on e-devices and put them away when you're talking with each other and at meal times.

Help your child make connections with others by urging him to play outside, encouraging her to invite friends over for in-person play, and limiting the time he spends with electronic devices (television included). It is very important that children interact with others, use their imaginations and engage with the world around them.

Be vigilant. You need to be involved in your child's life. If you give her an e-device, make sure you know what she is doing on it and how often she uses it. While these devices can open up a wide wonderful world, they need parental oversight to ensure proper use and to uncover any troublesome problems that may begin to develop.

Tom Tozer and Bill Black are authors of "Dads2Dads: Tools for Raising Teenagers." Like them on Facebook and follow them on Twitter @Dads2Dadsllc. Contact them at tomandbill@Dads2Dadsllc.com.