**Before Smartphones**

**NEW YORK, New York**(Achieve3000, January 7, 2019). "Put your phone away!" Why do parents always seem to say that to their kids?

In the age of smartphones, some parents worry that their children spend way too many hours texting, scrolling through their Instagram feeds, or watching YouTube videos. After all, some studies say that too much screen time can negatively affect everything from sleep patterns to social skills.

But concerns like these are nothing new. If you went back in time 50 or 100 years, you'd find moms and dads tearing their hair out over how some new form of technology might be affecting their kids.

**Too Much Radio!**

Radio may seem old-fashioned now, but in the 1920s and 1930s, it was the exciting new technology. Soap operas, westerns, and other types of stories were all acted out on the radio, complete with sound effects. Both kids and adults loved tuning in, but parents soon became worried that their children were spending too much time listening to those entertaining broadcasts.

Some experts agreed. Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, director of the Child Study Association of America, spoke to The Washington Post about this in 1931. "The radio seems to find parents more helpless than did [comic strips], the automobile, the movies, and other earlier invaders of the home," Gruenberg said, adding that the biggest worry radio gave parents was how it interfered with other interests, like conversation, music practice, group games, and reading.

Another concern was whatkids were listening to. In the early 1930s, a group of mothers from Scarsdale, New York, pushed for more child-friendly programming, urging radio broadcasters to change programs they thought were "[overstimulating](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=18412&step=11&c=1&sc=42&oid=0&ot=0&asn=1), frightening, and emotionally [overwhelming](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=18412&step=11&c=1&sc=42&oid=0&ot=0&asn=1)" for kids, according to Margaret Cassidy, a media historian at Adelphi University in New York.

The moms' activism led the National Association of Broadcasters to come up with a code of [ethics](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=18412&step=11&c=1&sc=42&oid=0&ot=0&asn=1) related to children's programming. The broadcasters pledged not to portray criminals as heroes and to refrain from glorifying greed, selfishness, and disrespect for authority.

**TV Takeover**

In the 1950s, radio got some serious competition when TV arrived on the scene. By 1955, more than half of all U.S. homes had a black-and-white TV set, according to Mitchell Stephens, a media historian at New York University.

Many of those kids who had loved the radio were parents in the TV era, and it was now their turn to worry. Many were concerned that TV programming simply wasn't appropriate for kids. A 1961 Stanford University study on 6,000 children found that more than half of the kids watched "adult" programs, such as crime shows. Researchers were aghast to discover that there was violence, even in children's programming. What was it doing to children, they wondered?

By the end of the 1950s, U.S. lawmakers had authorized $1 million (about $7 million today) to study the effects of TV violence, Cassidy said. She added that thousands of studies on the effects of television viewing were done in the decades that followed.

All that research eventually led the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) to its 1984 recommendation that parents limit their kids' exposure to television because it sent unrealistic messages to children, could lead to unhealthy weight gain, and had the potential to fuel violent behavior.

**Video Game Battle**

By the early 1980s, kids had a brand-new [obsession](https://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=18412&step=11&c=1&sc=42&oid=0&ot=0&asn=1): video games! The earliest games, like Pong and Pac-Man, were simple and repetitive but lots of fun, and they had many parents worrying that their kids would become too caught up in racking up points in the games.

And as new video games were released—some with violent storylines—some parents became concerned that playing them might encourage violent behavior. That concern hasn't completely gone away.

**Hello, Internet**

Then came the Internet. Like all those earlier technologies, it was both wondrous and worrisome. Back in the 1990s, people called the Internet the "information superhighway." Parents loved that it could help kids do homework and research. But when the Internet began linking people together through social media, some of those same parents became worried about stranger danger and cyberbullying.

No doubt, some would argue that today's technology is scary. But these days, there are plenty of tools to help parents monitor their children's online activities. For example, Apple added new controls in 2018 that allow parents to see when their children are on their devices and to check the websites their kids are visiting and the apps they're using. Apple's controls also allow parents to restrict certain types of apps and even establish a quiet period when most apps shut down.

While technology—and ways to control it—have changed over the years, one thing has stayed the same: Parents still worry about their kids and how technology will affect them.

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