

Why we should ban computers for one day a week

There's no doubt [computers are heaven-sent](#). Computers allow dads like me to reach out to friends, do research, chat with family and “accidentally” check the occasional porn site. Of course, our kids are also curious about everything that's out there on the Internet. Although we have already set down [technology rules](#) for them, they're not always working. Like many parents I meet, I started out strict but then failed to keep up the discipline. Then a friend told me about a single rule in his household – ban computers for one day a week.

My 10-year old started his computer addiction early. He's proficient enough to hack my Facebook account and type something silly as a status update, so I can only imagine the other stuff he gets into online. While I saw that computers were a boon for parenting in the beginning, I'm seeing a lot of headaches now.

The first problem came when I realized he was blinking and squinting more than usual. His pediatrician referred us to an eye specialist who confirmed that his eyes were getting too much computer use. The American Optometric Association (AOA) confirmed this is possible – that kids, just like adults, can [suffer from eye issues](#) including discomfort, irritation, fatigue, and even blurred vision from too much computer use.

I did what most dads do and banned him from the computer. Then, he did what most kids do, and returned to using it after I lost patience with enforcing the rule. The squinting and the blinking stopped, so I figured it was okay. But then we had another episode and seemed to be going back and forth every few months. Such were the compromises in parenting, I guess.

Then there's the very real issue of over-stimulation. The sounds and images that computers

produce are irresistible to children and immediately overwhelm and occupy them for hours on end. This over stimulation means other, more mundane activities become boring. For instance, where a coloring book offers distraction for some kids, mine finds them boring. "We can color online," he told me.

In fact, the TV is too boring for most computer-hooked kids, according to a study done by Pangea Media and YPulse where 77% of kids between 8 to 15 years said they'd rather [give up TV than the Internet](#).

Now, this is not to say kids and computer use shouldn't go together. Computer use also presents a lot of advantages. For starters, it helps in the development of motor skills, visual knowledge and hand-eye coordination. The stimulation (provided that it's not too much) can also help development vocabulary. Kids learn a lot on [educational websites](#) and include PBS Kids, Wonderopolis, National Geographic Little Kids and more.

As a father I've set rules that I can keep. We ban computers for one day a week – a digital Sabbath, if you will – so to give the eyes a rest and to bring back into focus those [childhood games](#) that are also important in child development.

We know that computer use presents advantages and disadvantages. This means that just like most things in life (except bacon and chocolates, which are all advantages), computer use is both a boon and a bane when it comes to parenting. So what's the solution? Limit your kid's time in front of the computer and ban computers for one day a week. During other days, insist on them taking a break after about half an hour in front of the computer. While you're at it, take your kid outside for a game of catch. Your bulging belly suggests that you could use some outdoor time anyway.

Also, explore parental control features to protect your kid from certain websites. While you're at it, make sure to clear your browsing history. The last thing I need is for my kid to see my search history.