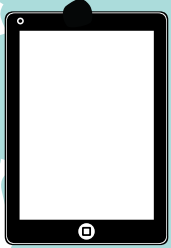


HELPING KIDS & TEENS DEAL WITH DIGITAL OVERWHELM



A summary of the simple strategies parents and caregivers can implement to support their children's and teens' digital wellbeing & learning as they learn online and transition back to schools.



ONLINE BRAINS

Learning online is mentally taxing. Foster physical movement, work in sprints (not marathons), cater for their visual preference & need for repetition. Learning online can be stressful. Help them to be effective online learners by using their biological rhythms (i.e. do most difficult work & avoid distractions during focused time), chunking information down & listening to music (slow, soft & familiar).



DIGITAL DISTRACTIONS

Students are facing a digital superstorm: developing brains (prefrontal cortex which helps with impulse control isn't fully developed) and persuasive design techniques make the digital world very appealing. Suggested digital strategies- out of sight, tech tools, maximise windows, log out, greyscale, Forest app, Do Not Disturb mode, batch notifications. Help them to "build a fortress around their focus."



DIGITAL IMPACT

Excessive or incorrect use of devices can impact children's and teens' physical health & mental wellbeing. Teach them correct ergonomics & habits to support their vision (20-20-20-20 rule), headphones (60-60 rule), posture (bring device to eyes), sleep (have a digital bedtime & keep devices out of bedrooms). Support their mental wellbeing by avoiding use tech time as a reward or punishment tool. Show an active interest.



UNPLUGGING

It's a 'typical' developmental response for kids AND teens to find it hard to digitally-disconnect. It's not necessarily a sign of 'addiction'. Help manage transitioning off tech by giving them warnings, have appealing transition activities, set endpoints, use timers and use protective technologies (I personally use and recommend The Family Zone). Engage in physical touch, movement and time outside when they unplug.



WEAN THE SCREEN

Start by establishing the ground rules WITH your child/teen (not ON them). Focus on more than HOW MUCH time they spend online. Consider WHAT they liked to do online, WHEN they were doing it and WHY they were doing it. What online activities are adding value? What's their tech-time displacing (i.e. the opportunity cost)? What digital activities do they want to continue and stop? Consider the needs displacement theory- is their tech-time giving them their Vitamin Cs (connection, control & competence)? Crowd out their undesirable tech habits with new habits using James Clear's CUE -> CRAVE -> RESPONSE -> REWARD model. Expect that their new behaviours will take time to embed, so it may get worse before it gets better. Remember, they've been eating at the all-you-can-eat buffet and now you're expecting them to eat ala carte meals with impeccable manners. Be persistent and remember there may be other emotional needs driving their behaviours and tech-time might be an avoidance strategy or coping mechanism.