

Our son, J is 13 and has been at The Rise now for just over a year. We would like to explain a little bit about why and how we tried to initiate switching off all J's gaming consoles and computers 2 hours before bedtime. We will also go on to explain why we did this and how it worked out for him and us.

The result of switching off all his technology 2 hours before bedtime was simply a complete revelation to us. After doing this for only a few weeks, J was like a different boy. He was less tired, he was more focused, his school work improved, but the real surprise was that he became more sociable with us. He wanted to talk to us more, play with his sister more. So, the surprise element, that we never expected, was that our relationship with him grew stronger.

J's English Teacher asked what he was doing differently at home, because he had noticed a real change in J's focus and ability to concentrate for longer. He had no idea we were turning off all the technology 2 hours before bedtime. This was the first inkling we had that it was working.

Let us take you back to the beginning and give you a bit of background about how we started.

Like a lot of children J has always been extremely interested in computers and video games.

As parents we encouraged his love of gaming as when J plays video games, he shows a full range of emotions: Happiness, sadness, frustration, anger, resilience and more. Yet when he's not gaming his emotions and feelings were much more limited and certainly quite difficult for us to see; unless it was an extreme emotion like a meltdown or laughing out loud.

We quickly realized that playing video games released endorphins and this was why J was feeling a range of emotions when he was

gaming. The thrill and excitement of playing a video game was the result of endorphins being released in his body.

With a bit of research, we learnt that when endorphins are released in the body they can also lower stress, anxiety levels and even create a sense of euphoria and well-being.

However, for all these positives, J was always very, very tired. We took him to the doctor who suggested medication, but that didn't work. We took him to a nutritionist who suggested a range of different diets, but that didn't work either.

After J had been at The Rise for a few months it was noticed by the teachers that he was always very tired. Consequently, it was suggested to us by Karen Oliver, the Assistant Head, that we turn off all his technology 2 hours before bedtime. We weren't thrilled by this idea, but we knew we had to try it to see if it helped.

The reason Karen suggested this idea, was that all digital screens, TV's, smart phones, laptops, iPads, gaming consoles, tablets etc. emit a blue light that is unseen by the human eye. If exposed to it, 2 hours before sleep, it can trigger a variety of sleep problems. We researched it a little further and as well as sleep problems, also found blue light can trigger physical, emotional and mental health disorders too

This was news to us. We had heard of blue light and that it might disrupt sleep, but we didn't appreciate how much, or that it could cause other problems too.

The research we read explained that blue light at night fools our body into thinking it's day. So, exposure to blue light emitted by screens in the hours before sleep can affect our body's ability to rest and consequently trigger sleep disorders.

We thought we had to try this. We sat J down and explained we had new information about blue light and for his health we were going to switch his tech off at an earlier time.

When he understood what we were going to do, was when the sparks started to fly! He was very resistant, to put it mildly.

But he had to switch his tech off at some point, so we restructured his time when he got home from school to try and make this as stress free for him as possible. We realised that when the tech was switched off, we had to replace it with something else.

His old routine was as follows:

- 3.20pm: Arrives home from school & immediately starts playing video games.
- 4.15pm: Homework (If he has any)
- 5pm: Dinner
- 5.20pm: Video games
- 8.30pm: Bath time
- 9pm: Bed

However, when he arrives home from school now, we have changed his routine:

- 3.20pm: Arrives home and has a snack straight away.
- 6pm: Plays video games or computer until 6pm. Then all tech is switched off.
- 6pm: Dinner
- 6.20pm: Homework (If he has homework, otherwise he plays board games, makes Lego, plays with his sister, reads and talks to us!)
- 8pm: Bath

- 8.30pm: Bed Time

Before we started this new routine, he was taking his iPad and gaming console to bed. He would switch them off, charge them in his bedroom overnight, then go straight to sleep.

The first thing we had to do was take all his tech out of his bedroom and charge it instead downstairs. J said that by doing this, we didn't trust him anymore. We explained that we did trust him, but we were taking temptation out of his way. We did try and leave it in his room one night, but it did prove too tempting for him and he started playing it again. After that, J understood how and why it was too tempting and we were able to move all the tech downstairs without a meltdown.

Another rule we instigated, was that he cannot have any screen time in the morning until he is dressed in his school uniform.

Consequently, we would sometimes find him downstairs at 5am, dressed and ready for school, just so he could play his gaming console!

So, we said he could not get up until 7am. J said okay, but only if he could use his iPad as an alarm! He does try to push the boundaries and was disappointed when we produced an alarm clock for him to use instead. We often have to explain why we are doing this and why he cannot have tech in his room. However, we find it helps to remind him of the positives of why we are doing this and that we are not merely doing it to be mean.

If asked today, J would probably tell you that he doesn't believe in blue light, because he cannot see it. But after a year of doing this it has benefited him enormously. Not only has his sleep improved, he's not tired during the day anymore, he's more focused so his school work has improved and he is more sociable with his family and friends at school.

If you can, we would highly recommend that you try this and if you have any questions or need any support, we would be only too happy to help.

Good Luck 😊