

Don't Let a Kids' Tablet Take the Parent Out of the Equation

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It's already happened so many times that the shock has completely worn off. But that doesn't mean my jaw didn't drop the first time I saw my daughter, who's three now, pushing her finger against a magazine page as if it would interact with her when she did. She's done the same thing with books and photos as well as my computer screen and our TV screen, much to my dismay. Hopefully some psychologist is at work at a better name for it, but for argument's sake, I'll call it touch-screen syndrome.

After finally convincing her to quit smudging up the flat-screen and that not all color images do something when you touch them, I moved on to teaching her how to handle our iPad with care.

"No throwing it. Clean the peanut butter off your hands before using it. Be careful not to step on it when dancing along with the hokey pokey app. Make sure to clean your drool off the screen right away. I don't know. Use your sleeve."

Somehow this process, born out of my incessant need to baby the gadget, turned into hours upon hours of my daughter and I exploring what this machine could do and how much it could teach us. While she was busy learning colors, numbers and the Alphabet, I was busy learning more about the stuff that fascinated my daughter. Of course there were lots of times I was guilty of just handing her the thing so I could veg out for a while. Lots of parents do it. But for as beneficial as that tune-out time can be for me, the time spent together with her, engaging with many genuinely educational and fun apps, was ultimately even more rewarding.

Of course, there have been plenty of times I've looked at the several children's tablets now available, like Polaroid's new Android-powered 7-inch tablet, and saw an easier solution. It's a relatively inexpensive proposition, similar to others on the market like the Kurio, Meep!, Nabi or Vinci. All are built to withstand bumps, shocks and peanut butter blobs, which means I could just hand it to her, confident in the parental controls I'd set, and zone out with my own tablet, playing Vice City. And therein lies the problem.

My original reason for staying close to her while she played with the iPad has now been rendered moot by handing her a kid's tablet, one that she'll undoubtedly love that I could also care less about. Once my admittedly shallow motivation is off the table, the chance for sharing meaningful time with my daughter over some mesmerizing technology is also out.

A lot of people, [wise people](#) [1], will just say to leave the tablet out of the equation. Get back to basics, they'll say. Play with something made out of wood, they'll say.

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Well, it's easy for someone to just say and it's a whole different ball of wax to deal with it once the tablet is out of the bag and your child is punching holes in the wall to get a few minutes with it.

Maybe it's a copout, but I'll accept that touch-screen computers will be around for awhile and that perhaps my daughter's interaction with today's technology could prove beneficial to her down the road. After all, technology wouldn't be where it is today if everyone's parents had limited them to only playing with wooden blocks and abacuses. And it's not like we got rid of all the books or anything.

Kid's tablets are basically toys; extremely sophisticated toys, but still toys. Given my interest in my daughter's other toys, Furby withstanding, I'm sure I'd just be happy if I never had to play with it. But our iPad, like any other tablet, is a tool that requires a sizable investment on your part.

Whether for me it was the thought of those dollars going down the drain if my kid smashed the screen or just my annoying penchant toward always polishing the screen, it drew me closer to her when she was playing with it. While I was I there, we actually had fun playing with it together.

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[1] http://blogs.babycenter.com/mom_stories/01032012-your-2-year-old-doesnt-need-an-ipad/