

My Unique Perspective: The Future of the 3-parent child

Imagine sitting in a restaurant enjoying a meal. You look around and see multiple families with toddlers. There would be a common scene playing out. A kid starts to create a ruckus - parents promptly hand over their cellphone to play a game. Another kid is not eating his meal - parents immediately start a YouTube video so that he quietly gulps down his food. Does this sound relatable?

I have several friends and colleagues who use the cell phone as a child-management tool to such an extent that the phone should be given the position of ***the third parent*** in their families.

Technology addiction in the current generation

Through technology, we do things today which were unimaginable 10 years back. In our palms, we hold computing power more than was available to NASA during the 1969 moon landing and more storage than the Library of Alexandria. But this technology has as much power to inflict damage as it does good.

We have become so accustomed to having gadgets all around us that we cannot imagine a quiet moment to ourselves. We are imposing the same life on young children who do not have a choice in this matter.

The current adult generation had a chance to spend their childhood in a world without this technology and got exposed to it as teenagers or adults. Even so, we are seeing increased occurrences of loneliness, stressed relationships, polarization and the need for regular dopamine hits. Even after being aware of the ill-effects of technology, we are not able to control our usage and addiction to our devices. Big technology companies have an army of engineers and designers working to exploit the way our brains work and undermine the agency we have over our minds.

"We have Paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology. We're all being domesticated into being the kind of human animal that is best suited for the attention economy."

- [Tristan Harris](#) (Co-Founder & President, Center for Humane Technology)

Why do parents do it?

Many activists like Tristan Harris are trying to spread awareness about the ill-effects technology can have on children and adults alike. Modern technology has been designed to be so unobtrusive that we do not even realise the dependence we have on our gadgets. Why do parents rely on these gadgets to manage their children? Because parenting is tough and a majority of us are oblivious to

the long term negative effects of this technology. Parents are stressed with work and managing the household. If technology pacifies an unruly child, why not do it? Why is parenting only difficult for the current generation? Did the earlier generation not have full time jobs? In fact, the earlier generation had more children per family as compared to now.

In today's age, families are nuclear, both parents have full time jobs (much tougher for single parent households), we are busier and more stressed because of 24*7 work schedules (aggravated by the ubiquitous devices). In the earlier generation, it was common to live in joint families with grandparents and other relatives living in the same house or nearby. It was uncommon for both parents to be working; work life balance was much better. The *tools* used to keep a child busy were books, hobbies and outdoor games; none of which have a generational negative or addictive effect.

Current and future impact on children

Now imagine what impact this perfected technology has on the undeveloped brain of a child. Studies suggest children who have been raised with an overexposure to gadgets show increased occurrences of:

- **Screen addiction:** Acts as digital heroin, as bad as drugging a child. A child will feel lost without a screen and will have withdrawal symptoms. They will want to reach out for the phone every time their hands are free (as an adult, even I cannot control my hands around my phone).
- **Antisocial behaviour:** Children will not learn to interact with people around and engage in outdoor sports which are essential to a child's development. They tend to become antisocial from a very young age.
- **Vision problems:** Excessive exposure to screens can strain the eyes and cause early onset of myopia in children.
- **Sleep disorders:** Messed up circadian rhythm due to exposure to blue light causes sleep disorders in children which messes their overall health.
- **Eating disorders:** Children eating while staring at a screen are uninterested in food and eat very slowly. They might also not get satiated and might overeat causing obesity.
- **Dopamine addiction/Depression:** Screens trigger the reward mechanism of the brain and release dopamine. Constant dopamine hits mess with the reward centre of the brain and impedes cerebral growth. This can cause depression over the long term since the child might not find playing with friends and outdoor sports stimulating.
- **Physiological issues:** Children might develop a bad posture while playing games. Constant exposure to screens might also cause severe headaches.

How will these issues play out in the future? Studies suggest that as adults, these children will be more prone to depression, aggressive and violent behaviour, obesity and much more. Big technology companies are also being blamed for manipulating our independent thought. Children

being raised on social media and technology will have no idea of the manipulation they will be subjected to and will lose all semblance of independent thought. As adults, these children will face difficulty in maintaining relationships; much more than what we are facing right now. Their over-involvement in the digital realm will make it difficult for them to process things in the real world.

What can parents do about this?

Firstly, parents must be aware and mindful of this problem. Parents need to understand that kids learn by observing them. Parents can develop good habits in children by keeping a check on their own addiction in front of them. If parents stay glued to their phones in front of their children, they are bound to emulate that. Parents should set healthy boundaries such as '**no-phone dinners**' to set an example for their children.

If parents engage with the child by reading books, doing hobbies and playing games together, a child would have something of interest to do outside the games or videos on the phone. Interaction and storytelling during mealtime makes food interesting for the kid and develops a healthy relationship with food.

The message to take away from this is all technology usage is not necessarily evil. Adults need to be **intentional** in the use of technology, even for their own sake. Using the cell phone as a third parent is a very unintentional way of using the technology. For the most part, the relationships of the current adult generation with our parents are good because they took the time to establish a loving bond with us. Imagine our parents hiring a nanny whose only job was to keep us happy by feeding us cravings such as candy, snacks, soda and letting us play whatever video games we wanted. This nanny (a third parent) would become the one we interacted with when our actual parents were occupied or we threw a tantrum. Children would love this third parent the most because they fulfil all their demands. How do you think the child's relationship would be with such parents after growing up? Would the children be closer to their parents or to this third parent who always made them happy?

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