

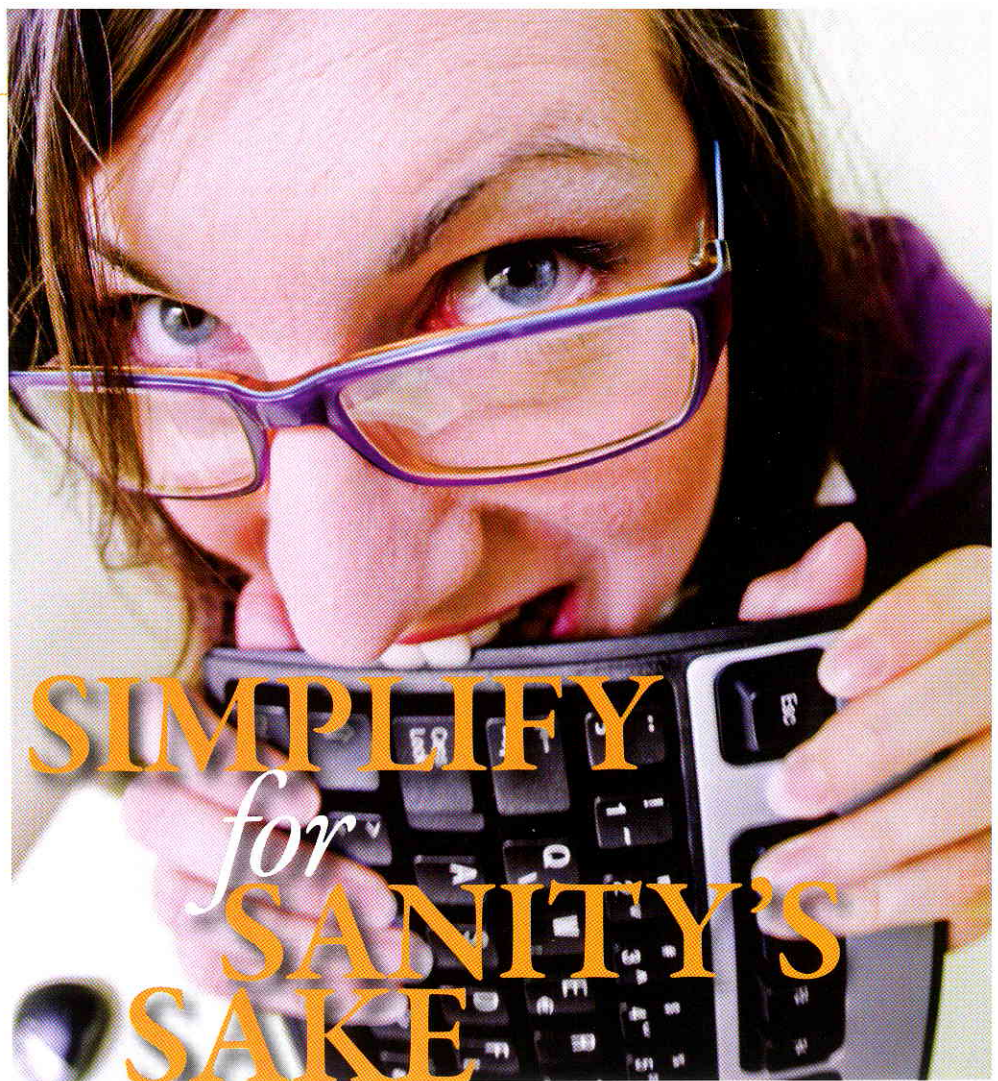


LIFE STRATEGIES INSIGHTS FROM PARENTING & LIFE STRATEGIST TRICIA FERRARA

Q: Sometimes I feel like computers and gadgets have taken over my family's lives. My inbox is overflowing. My kids (ages 11 and 15) are glued to the computer from the minute they come home from school and insist that they must use it for homework and to stay connected. Even when friends come over, they are online or texting non-stop. I'm ready to pull the plug! How can I make sense of it all?

A: What started out to be a trickle of digital information has grown into daily tidal waves, leaving many of us feeling overwhelmed, defeated and confused. A generation ago we may have had less information, but we felt sane. We weren't compelled to multitask for survival. Adults and children alike are trying to maintain sanity while juggling several things at once.

There are real consequences for children who are overloaded with information during critical periods of development. Studies show that developing minds have limited mental space for processing



new information. Children will need strong thinking skills to make good judgments throughout their young lives. Overload can derail their ability to acquire these skills. Constant streams of distractions, whether it is late-breaking news about teen idol Miley Cyrus, or a life-or-death e-mail from a BFF, add complexity. Feeling chaotic and confused is part of the fallout. It is important to help children see that keeping it simple will help keep it sane.

Research shows

Research shows that multitasking to be more efficient is a fallacy. As it turns out, when multitasking, your brain has to rearrange task assignment. This comes at the expense of learning and memory, both of which are at a premium for adolescents. Recent studies show that cell phone use while driving can have as much negative impact on response time as consuming alcohol. Evidence also suggests that stress hormones are boosted while multitasking. This additional stress will cause already "reactive" teens to become "over-reactive" to the ups and downs of life. 🌻

Tips for Success

As a parent, modeling good habits is essential:

- 1) *Make face-to-face interactions high priority*
- 2) *Minimize cell phone use in the car*
- 3) *Set aside specific times to check and respond to e-mail*
- 4) *Turn off the TV for extended periods to build distraction-free time and space zones*

Be a "gatekeeper" for your family when it comes to the number of directions they are pulled. Feeling sane requires a sense of peace and control. Set firm boundaries around when and how much technology can interrupt or compete with priorities such as a family meal or homework.

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