**On You Mind – Jan/Feb 2018, Education**

Jonathan C. Robinson, Ph.D.

Dear Dr. Robinson,

 So, I got my kids through the holidays. We saw extended family. They loved playing with their cousins. Had lots of fun. Now, school starts back soon. When I bring it up, I get a chorus of, “aww, do we hafta?” Of course they “hafta.” They’re just saying that to get in my grill. Still, though, we all deal with getting back to routine reality. Why do they buck up every year when holidays are over? Call Me Confused.

Dear Confused,

 Welcome to the club. You’re right. Almost all kids experience a recoil from fun holidays. It’s human nature. Unless you have the most fun job ever, I bet you don’t look forward to returning to the routine of your work. So, rather than focus on their words, use your active listening skills to focus on their feelings. After you see their emotional fever lessen, offer some tidbits with the leading question, “I have some thoughts about what’s going on. Do you want to hear them?” Remember, kids of all ages really like it when parents ask their permission to continue. It’s novel to them.

 What your kids are basically experiencing is a grieving process. They don’t want the fun holiday stuff to stop. They miss it and are comparing it to what they are seeing as not-fun school stuff. So, start with a chronological review of holiday activities, who they got to play with, what a blast they had. This review will lift their spirits as they re-live the holiday revelry.

 Next, instead of buying into their dread about returning to school work, reframe their dread to encourage their curiosity. “I wonder” statements generate curiosity. Encourage talk about how the holidays went for friends they didn’t see. Be curious about how their teacher spent his/her holiday. Help them look forward to scheduled school events, like the next “fun Friday” or class field trip, or topical study that they love, like dinosaurs or bugs or science. This kind of directed conversation with your kids will help them both recapture their holiday fun and get in a better mood for return to school, looking forward to it rather than dreading it. Good luck!

Dear Dr. Robinson,

 My middle schooler is completely “plugged in.” He snap chats, texts, posts selfies with his friends, Instagram’s, and games almost 24/7. I almost never get eye contact with him, unless he wants something. We’ve fussed at him about this and he just calls us ancient. Every one of his teachers has a parent portal on-line to keep us informed of class activities, homework, and assignments. They also have their students use their IPads to look up material for class, write reports, and do assigned reading. It’s all so overwhelming to me. I don’t know whether he’s wasting time or tasking efficiently. How can I be encouraging but not overbearing? Signed, Trying To Get It Right

Dear Trying,

 To quote one of our former presidents, “I feel your pain.” I am one of the most cyber-techno illiterate geezers I know, but, like you, I’m trying. Here are some thoughts.

 First, make use of what you have. Keep the routine that works for you and your son. Use a family calendar in a common area to write down coming events in all of your lives. Get your son used to writing his events down as well. Check your parent portal daily to be informed of class direction, projects, assignments upcoming tests and reports. Touch base with your son daily, as you review calendar listings and portal entries.

 Second, let your son know how you are feeling. Left out? Confused? Overwhelmed? A lot of kids don’t realize that their parents are real people with feelings and concerns of their own. When you bump up against technology, do the role reversal thing and ask your son for help teaching you new things. He’ll get a kick out of that.

 Third, a wise person once said, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” For school work, grades are the currency. If your son is maintaining A’s and B’s in all his subjects, then his computer time gaming and the like is not affecting him adversely. If his grades are not up to par, then consequent by restricting electronics, especially gaming, gradually returning them as his grades improve. Catch him being good. Reinforce every good grade he gets and appreciate him.

 That said, current research confirms that most kids have way too much screen time. A good rule of thumb is that screen gaming is limited to an hour/day and only after homework is complete. Also, if grades are not the issue, but relationship is, then consider such things as screen-free zones, like at the dinner table, where you can actually talk to each other. Or, ask to join him in competitive gaming, where you have 2 sets of controls. Technology is neither good nor bad. Advances will continue to be made. It’s what we do with them that counts. Hang in there.