Before you give a new device to your child or teen for the holidays, read the following tips for tweens, teens, and screens! (Kristen Wynns, Ph.D.)

- Make a media use plan for your family. Take into account not only the quantity, but the quality and location of media use. Consider TVs, phones, tablets and computers. The rules should be written down and agreed upon by all family members.
- Screens should be kept out of kids' bedrooms. Put in place a "media curfew" at mealtime and bedtime, putting all devices away or plugging them into a charging station for the night.
- Excessive media use has been associated with obesity, lack of sleep, school problems, aggression and other behavior issues. Limit entertainment screen time to less than one or two hours per day.
- Take an active role in your children's media education by co-viewing programs with them and discussing values.
- Look for media choices that are educational, or teach good values -- such as empathy, racial and ethnic tolerance. Choose programming that models good interpersonal skills for children to emulate.
- Be firm about not viewing content that is not age appropriate: sex, drugs, violence, etc. Movie and TV ratings exist for a reason, and online movie reviews also can help parents to stick to their rules.
- The Internet can be a wonderful place for learning. But it also is a place where kids can run into trouble. Keep the computer in a public part of your home, so you can check on what your kids are doing online and how much time they are spending there.
- Discuss with your children that every place they go on the Internet may be "remembered," and comments they make will stay there indefinitely. Impress upon them that they are leaving behind a "digital footprint." They should not take actions online that they would not want to be on the record for a very long time.
- Become familiar with popular social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. You may consider having your own profile on the social media sites your children use. By "friending" your kids, you can monitor their online presence. Pre-teens should not have accounts on social media sites. If you have young children, you can create accounts on sites that are designed specifically for kids their age.
- Talk to them about being good "digital citizens," and discuss the serious consequences of online bullying. If your child is the victim of cyberbullying, it is important to take action with the other parents and the school if appropriate. Attend to children's and teens' mental health needs promptly if they are being bullied online, and consider separating them from the social media platforms where bullying occurs.
- Make sure kids of all ages know that it is not appropriate or smart to send or receive pictures of people without clothing, or sexy text messages, no matter whether they are texting friends or strangers.
- Check out a sample "Media Time Family Pledge" for online media use.
- If you're unsure of the quality of the "media diet" in your household, consult with your children's pediatrician on what your kids are viewing, how much time they are spending with media, and privacy and safety issues associated with social media and Internet use.

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The following is a Family Time Media Pledge that you can use for your family. Use this as a starting point and modify as needed for your family's needs. The goal is to incorporate technology into our lives in a meaningful way that allows us to have a healthy balance of online and off-line time.

Kids and Teens

- I will never give out personal information online or by text and will avoid all chat rooms except ones my mom and dad have looked at and approved.
- I understand my parents have a right to check into my media history on my computer and phone and other devices such as iPod Touch, games, and whatever else I use regularly. I will try and keep my total screen time to 2 hours a day except when doing a project for school, or when my parents give me permission.
- I will not watch shows or play games that are inappropriate for me or for friends and family watching or playing with me.

Parents

- I will check what my kids are doing online and on their phones, consider using parent controls, and use them judiciously.
- I will let my kids know before I check their computers or enable parent controls on their computers or gaming units.
- I will take the time to be interested in what my kids are doing online and in the digital world and talk to them about that world.
- I will help them make good media choices.
- If my child makes a mistake, I will ask questions and learn what happened before I punish or take away technology.
- I will only take away technology as a last resort for defying our family pledge when other consequences have failed to work, such as reinforcing the rules and increase off-line chores.

Entire Family

- We will talk as a family at a meal a day with no technology in sight!
- We will agree to technology-free times such as meals, weekends, and vacations.
- We won't sacrifice important family time for media or digital use of any kind. If media gets in the way, we need to recognize we are using it too much or in a way that is not helping our family.
- We agree to use technology responsibly by not
    - Texting or talking on a cell phone while driving
    - Using cell phones in a public location where it may annoy others
    - Using technology to harm others by engaging in bullying or slanderous actions
    - Listening to music with earbuds in a manner that prevents us from hearing passing cars or pedestrians, and never while in the car as the driver

Date:_____

Signed: Parents:_____

Kids and Teens:_____