



February 13th, 2015

Dear family members of Rockway students,

Digital media and smartphones are everywhere. It's hard to imagine life without instant access to Google, Facebook, texting, and online apps. Our children are the first generation to be this "connected" - that is, to face constant competition with screens that have invaded every aspect of their lives.

At Rockway, we place tremendous value on community and we intentionally provide opportunities for students to foster face-to-face relationships. As a place of faith, we encourage our students to look inward, and create space for reflection and balance in their lives. These values are at the core of our mission: to develop *reflective* and *responsible* learners as we strive to form faith and build character within our students.

And so, it is with these principles in mind that we extend an invitation for you and your family to participate in the Rockway Tech Timeout challenge.

What is the Tech Timeout Challenge?

The Tech Timeout Challenge is an innovative program that asks students and their families to shutdown their technology for a few days and reflect on their experience. Other schools within North America are taking on the challenge with eye-opening results. By taking a few days off, we quickly realize how dependent we are on our devices. According to recent studies, 8-18 year-olds are connected to some form of electronic media for 8 -12 hours per day and may be missing out on the positive effects of tech-free family time and face-to-face friend interactions.

The Timeout Details

Beginning on **Tuesday, February 24th, 2015** we are inviting our entire school community to put aside their technology and survive *three full days* without digital devices. This is a school-wide initiative, with students, teachers, and staff participating. Parents and caregivers are also invited to participate! The challenge will end **Thursday, February 26th** at midnight, and students will have a chance to debrief their experience the next day in homeroom.

While the challenge is voluntary, *we are aiming for 100% participation.* We invite you to see this as a unique opportunity for awareness and relationship building. Plus it's much easier to "unplug" when all those around you are doing the same.

The goal of the Tech Timeout is not to demonize technology, but rather to help us take a step back and gain some perspective on our media habits. We hope that the perspective gained from the challenge will help us find balance and moderation in our future media use.

Our pilot project

Before rolling this challenge out to the entire school, we ran a Tech Timeout pilot project with our Grade 10 ComTech class in first semester. We were delighted to have many families commit to the Timeout alongside their students with meaningful results. Positive feedback from this trial encouraged us to create an opportunity for our entire community to participate in.

Keeping parents in the loop

Parents sometimes resist the idea of their kids not having cell phones. The access they grant is convenient and reassuring. That's why we're making a concerted effort to keep you in the loop. By giving your family time to plan ahead, you will have ample opportunity to carefully organize your family activities, coordinate pick-ups/drop-offs, develop back-up plans and emergency contacts. In this packet you will find more information on the Tech Timeout, as well as a list of **Frequently Asked Questions**, and a sheet that you and other family members can sign pledging your own participation in the Tech Timeout.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Sara Wahl, the Tech Timeout coordinator (saraw@rockway.ca - 519-743-5209 ext. 3529), and/or Ann L. Schultz (principal@rockway.ca). If you'd like to learn more about this program in general, visit techtimetype.com. We're looking forward to an amazing experience.

Sincerely,

Sara Wahl
Tech TimeOut Coordinator

Why take a Tech Timeout?

Young people are growing up in a technological world that allows them access to a vast array of information and opportunities. But like all good things, balance and moderation are key.

Finding balance in a digital world

Finding balance has become increasingly difficult as devices become so prominent that they invade every aspect of our lives. Teens themselves complain about digital devices interfering at social events, and as some tech habits verge on addictive, research suggests that teens run the risk of having fragmented attention spans and underdeveloped empathy skills.

Part of our Mission

Rockway's mission is to form faith and build character in our students as they become reflective and responsible learners. A Tech Timeout is an opportunity for our students to take an intentional step back from the fast-pace and ubiquitous nature of digital technology and reflect on its influence in their lives.

Furthermore, we have deliberately planned for our TimeOut to occur during **Lent**. This is a time in the Christian calendar traditionally marked with fasting or self-denial, when we are encouraged to look inward and reflect on our faith journey. Another significant faith tradition we explore at Rockway is that of **Sabbath** - a time of rest from work, to create space for connecting to God, and others. By briefly turning off the "noise" that technology can bring, it is our hope that all of us will have made "space" for God's voice to emerge.

"But I am a good multitasker"

Media users often say, "I'm great at multitasking!", however recent research would suggest just the opposite. Heavy multitaskers have difficulty filtering out irrelevant information and managing their working memory. They are chronically distracted and less creative, and as a result, *become poor at multitasking!*

Now consider the teen who listens to music in front of the TV, while checking Facebook and awaiting a text message from a friend, all while trying to muscle through their homework. The solution is not to become better at multitasking, but better at focusing. Studies have shown that focusing on one task at a time, even for short periods, yields a greater volume of higher quality work. So go ahead and engage your social media, but during that time do **ONLY** this, rather than dividing your attention.

Great ideas, important discoveries

Most great inventions, most important discoveries have come from periods of intense focus and contemplation. Finding the time and place where we can just quietly think has become increasingly difficult as the digital world squeezes in around us. Finding balance requires conscious effort - we will have to carve it out perhaps, by taking an occasional Tech Timeout.

Rockway Tech Timeout

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How will I contact my student without their phone?

A: Sometimes the strongest resistance to students giving up their technology for a few days comes from parents. How will I get a hold of my kid? Plan pickups? What about homework? We will try to mitigate those concerns by clearly communicating our intentions upfront and emphasizing planning. In fact, learning to schedule without the aid of last-minute calls or text messages is one of the big lessons that comes from doing a Tech Timeout. Discuss your plans with your student, and explain that without cell phones, commitments become more concrete.

Q: Can my child opt out?

A: Yes, this challenge is voluntary, although we'd like the whole school to participate! We encourage every student to give it a shot. This is a unique opportunity and there are valuable life lessons to be learned from the experience. If your student is resisting, use it as an opportunity to ask them why they are so fearful of being tech-free for a mere three days.

Q: What can and can't my child use during their Tech Timeout?

A: Using feedback from our pilot project, we've chosen to include technologies in the Timeout that would encourage participants to truly "take a break" and create "space" in their lives. Refer to the list of technologies on the pledge sheet for the exact parameters of the Tech Timeout. The basic rule of thumb is that we're abstaining from anything with a screen.

Q: All of my child's homework is online - how will they do their schoolwork?

A: The entire Rockway community is participating in this challenge (teachers, staff and even the Board of Directors!). Teachers are planning for the Timeout, and will not require students to be online in order to complete their work during the challenge.

Q: What if I catch my student using their phone during the Tech Timeout?

A: Failing in a Tech Timeout is just as much a part of the experience as succeeding. It brings awareness and perspective on our technology dependency. So even trying and failing is better than not trying at all.

Q: Are you teaching my child to fear technology?

A: Not at all. We love technology. But taking a recess from digital saturation does open one's eyes to new experiences: family conversations, board games, and even eye contact, to name a few. Being fully present in the moment is a challenge when digital technology is so pervasive.

Q: How can I support my student during their Tech Timeout?

A: Consider taking the Tech Timeout Challenge right alongside your student. What a fun and meaningful way for you to connect with your teenager - a true bonding experience. During our pilot project, several entire families decided to take the challenge together, with worthwhile results.

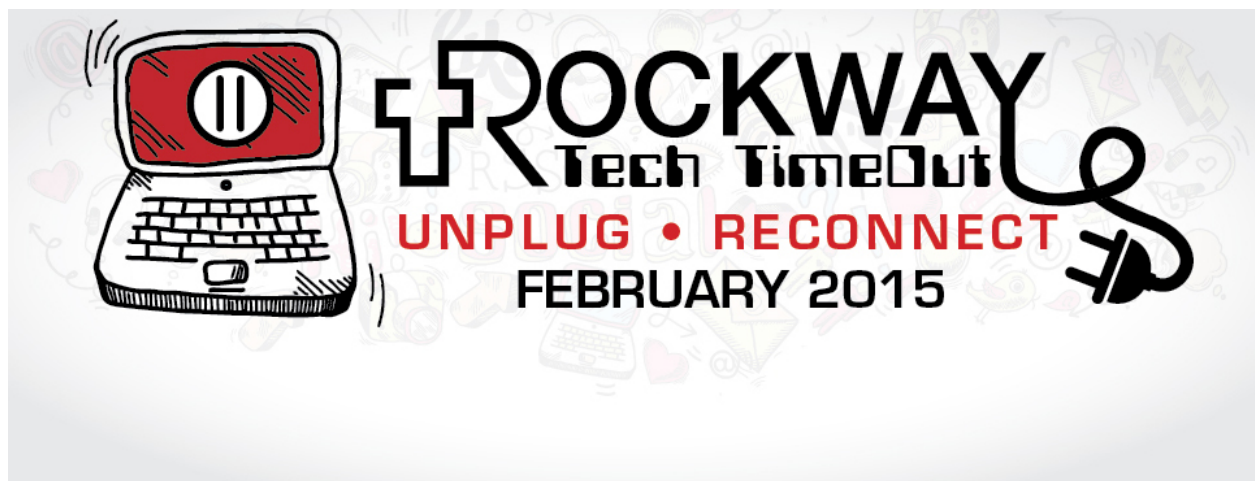
We've included a pledge sheet in this packet which you can fill out and return with your student if you choose to participate. You can also encourage them with ideas on how to spend their time, plan for things in advance, and tune in to the real world.

Q: What is the takeaway from this experiment?

A: It depends on the individual. Some participants may go right back to their habits. Others may learn to appreciate the gift of time and space that a tech-free "Sabbath" offers. Mostly, one gains an increased awareness of how technology fits and should fit into our lives. We hope that the debriefing session on Feb. 27th will present some concrete takeaways - we see this exercise as a tangible way of connecting faith & work.

Q: What if there is a school closure during the Tech TimeOut?

A: In the interest of safety, the main office will remain connected as per usual, during business hours. In the event of inclement weather, please check the Rockway website as it is the most expedient and reliable way for us to convey critical information to the Rockway community.



Trying a Tech Timeout at Home

Before the Tech Timeout

1. **Sit down with your family.** Look at the calendar and decide who is able to commit to the Timeout. Make some plans as a family to avoid relying on digital devices for critical communication during that time. Remember, there will never be a perfect time - sometimes you just have to jump in.
2. **Decide on parameters** for your own Tech Timeout. Are parents able to commit outside of business hours? What will be the most difficult part and how will you overcome it? And what, if anything, are you looking forward to about the Tech Timeout? Keep in mind, this is supposed to be awareness-building (even fun!), not punitive.
3. **Communicate** with anyone who needs to know that you will be taking a Tech Timeout. This could be your boss, your friends, your family. Let them know you will not be as easy to get hold of during those days, and the best ways to do so.

During the Tech Timeout

1. **Communicate.** It will be difficult at first, but make sure you and your family update one another on your respective whereabouts and plans. Stick to the plan.
2. **Encourage each other.** It is much easier to resist the temptation to turn on your device if you know that your community & family are resisting as well.
3. **Enjoy other activities:** play a board game, read a book, invite another Rockway family over, draw or paint, go for a walk, host an “unplugged” party, help with homework, practice a musical instrument or sport, and most importantly, hang out with each other or other family and friends. One interesting observation from our pilot project was that all participants got significantly more sleep during the Timeout. Chronic sleep deprivation in teenagers is a growing problem and has links to mental health challenges as well as academic struggles. Embrace this opportunity to catch up on your rest.

Students will have a chance to **debrief** in their homeroom classes both during and after the Timeout is over. A video “confession” booth will be set up in the student lounge during the challenge for our students to record their reactions and struggles as we go.

After the Tech Timeout

Debrief: What were the easiest parts? What parts of the challenge were the most difficult? Was it easier or harder than you thought it would be? Has it changed the way you think about your media habits? And... could you do it again? Would you consider building in a tech-free “Sabbath” into your regular routine?



Tech Timeout FAMILY PLEDGE

I/ We, _____, pledge to participate in the Rockway Tech Timeout Challenge along with my student, _____.

I/We will go three days without the use of screened devices, and shall encourage my student to succeed in doing the same. This includes:

- computers/internet/WIFI
- handheld devices such as cell phones, smart phones, iPads, tablets
- iPods
- television

I / We promise to be honest, honorable, and open with my efforts. If my student or I fail at any time during the three days, we will not be discouraged and will try again to return to the Tech Timeout for the remainder of the period.

Signatures

Date



Tech Timeout

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGN-OFF

I acknowledge that my student _____ is participating in the Rockway Tech Timeout Challenge for three days between **Tuesday, February 24th** and midnight **Thursday, February 26th**.

The timeout includes refraining from the use of all screened devices, including:

- computers/internet/WIFI
- handheld devices such as cell phones, smart phones, tablets
- iPods
- television

I shall do my best to encourage and help them throughout the duration of this challenge.

Signature

Date