

In the essay “The Digital Parent Trap,” Eliana Dockterman writes about how there are benefits to introducing technology to children at a young age. To build this argument, she compares both sides, explains the flaws in her opposition, and offers concrete evidence for her argument.

Dockterman starts the essay by explaining the current problem, then comparing and appealing to both sides of the argument. She uses a negative tone towards the parents who do not allow their children the use of technology. This is conveyed using exaggeration to prove her point, such as “some [parents] are even paying as much as \$24,000 to send their kids to monthlong ‘digital detox’ programs...” (2). These exaggerations are meant to paint a negative picture towards the lengths that parents will go to restrict early technology. Dockterman also uses a rhetorical question, asking which side (prohibit technology at a young age vs. encourage it) is right, while humanizing both sides of the argument by describing them as parental figures (3). This builds her ethos by acknowledging that both sides have valid points, making her audience more likely to listen to what she has to say.

Dockterman then begins to explore the opposition of her argument and explain some flaws in this opposition. She notes that there is evidence for the bad side effects of technology at an early age in a recreational setting. For example, she notes the age-old “Parental Adage” which states that the less screen time a child has, the better, which comes from cyberbullying and social media, which can make kids “feel depressed and insecure” (4). Skeptics of her argument might also mention the presence of “decades of studies proving that watching too much TV can lead to obesity, violence and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder” (5).

Dockterman further acknowledges her opposition by quoting the Waldorf School, a school that prevents their children from accessing technology (6). She includes quotes that point out the benefits of restricting technology, such as igniting “passion for lifelong learning” (6), which might cause even skeptics to start believing what she says. She then takes this evidence and shows that people have tried to translate it into an educational setting and explains why this does not work. After noting the dangers of social media and the internet, she points to research done at the University of California, saying that kids can learn about topics online that they could not before and to a greater depth by connecting with others knowledgeable in that topic (7). The use of credible studies to support Dockterman’s point not only further establishes her ethos, but implies to her audience, which is likely parents, that they are preventing their child from learning to their full potential by prohibiting their technology. At the very end of the paper, she also notes that “None of this means kids deserve unfettered access to the gadget of their choice...” (12), arguing that the previous dangers of social media should be irrelevant if the parent doesn’t expose them to it, other than for educational purposes (12). This would make the parents that prevented their kid from using technology for education purposes realize their mistake, and feel guilty in a sense, appealing to Dockterman’s pathos.

Dockterman finally uses statistics and logic to back up her position and fully explain the benefits of early technology use. The first statistics come from MIT, explaining that when children actually do a puzzle, rather than have it taught to them, they retain a lot more, increasing from a maximum of 50% (when the teacher does a demonstration) to 90% (9). To provide a possible explanation for this, she points out the children are more engaged while they

do online activities, which is further backed up when she introduced more statistics about how playing puzzle games improve performance on logic tests (8). These statistics provide concrete evidence for the audience, as the numbers allow for them to visualize the change that providing their children with online materials will have. She finishes with what she calls the “most convincing argument” (11): which is competition. Dockterman further establishes pathos by using a quote from a principal in a low-income school, which says “If you look at applying for college or a job, that’s on the computer.... If we’re not exposing our students to this stuff early, they’re going to be left behind” (11). The chance that a parent’s child would fall behind hopefully causes a sense of urgency in the audience, and perhaps feelings of guilt in those parents who had restricted their child’s use of technology at an early age. The logical statements used in this quote also make the effects of prohibiting technology at an early age quite clear, appealing to Dockterman’s logos.

In “The Digital Parent Trap”, Eliana Dockterman builds an argument in hopes of persuading her audience that there are benefits to early technology use in an educational setting. She does this by using evidence to prove her point and disprove her opposition and establishing trust then using that to emotionally convince parents to help their child by allowing them early access to technology.