



Whose kids? Our Kids!

TEENS AND SCREEN TIME

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Relationships, exercise, and sleep are essential to health and well-being yet might be replaced by technology use. Help your teen create a plan for balancing sleep and other activities with phone or screen use.



Smartphones, televisions, computers, and tablets are all useful technologies that help teens connect with friends and family, quickly find information, complete homework, and relax and have fun. Yet, too much time using screens can be harmful, taking away from important daily activities, like studying, socializing or exercise, and may result in health problems.

Screens and the brain

Screen technology, including smartphones, social media, and video games, can be addictive. The same brain chemicals released by addictive drugs are released after satisfying experiences online. For instance, seeing people “like” something we posted on social media feels good and makes our brain crave that feeling again, just like a drug! This is especially true for teenagers, whose brains are naturally wired to focus on people their own age, to pay attention to what their peers are up to and what these peers think of them. Teens’ brains are wired to seek out new experiences. Because the internet is full of new things, it can be hard for teens to stop exploring!

Research also shows that the mere presence of a smartphone (even if it’s turned off) is distracting. A smartphone, tablet, television, or computer (that is not being used for homework) can make it difficult for a teen to concentrate on their studies. Making a house rule to keep phones, tablets, and computers away

from study locations, unless one of these devices is necessary for their studying, can help teens focus on their schoolwork.

Screens and well-being

Without limits, screen time can start to replace important daily activities that keep your teen healthy and happy. For instance, teens may sacrifice time outdoors or getting exercise because of screen use. Screens also make it difficult for teens to sleep. The bright light from a phone or TV makes our bodies think it is daytime, and videos, music, or social media can produce stimulation that makes it difficult for a teen to relax and sleep. Therefore, it is a good habit to keep smartphones out of the bedroom. Studies also show that screens impact relationships— people have trouble paying attention to a conversation if a phone is out.

Parents make a difference!

Your teen can use your help setting limits on screen time. Health professionals recommend that teens use smartphones for no more than an hour or two a day, but you and your teen might decide that more time than that is okay. Talk with your teen and allow them to have input on what the rules around screen time in the house should be. If your teen helps set the rules, they will be more likely to respect them.



Household rules about tech-free zones

Together set clear rules about when smartphones or other screens are allowed. Designate certain places in your home as off-limits for phones and screens. It makes the most sense to designate these “Tech-Free Zones” in areas where your teen studies and sleeps, as well as where you have conversations as a family. Setting tech-free times of day, such as during study time, meals or bedtime, also supports these other important daily activities.

You can be a good role model for your teen by also following the rules. If your teen is not allowed to use their phone during family meals, you can join them in setting the phone aside. If you decide that there are no screens after dinner so your teen can focus on homework, then seeing you do something besides watching TV or scrolling social media will help your teen follow the rule. By practicing screen-free time every day, teens will be better able to ignore their phone when it is especially important such as when they are in a conversation or need to study for a test.



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Use screens together

Playing games, watching videos, looking at social media—these are often things we do alone, but we can also make screen time a social activity. Share interesting

videos or social media feeds. Play a video game together. Create a shared playlist for car travel. Being open to experiencing your teen’s interests can strengthen your relationship with her or him.

How to set limits on screen time

- ▶ **BE AWARE.** Track how much time you and your teen spend using devices with screens. What activities are you using these devices for? How much time is spent on each activity?
- ▶ **IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS.** What are ways that people limit their screen use? What are you already doing to limit screen time in your family? Can this be improved? What else can you do?
- ▶ **MAKE A PLAN.** Together with your teen, decide what limits and rules to set around screen time. What are the tech-free zones in the house? What are the tech-free times of each day? How much time should be allowed for each activity on a screen? Make a “family contract” where your whole family agrees to follow these rules.
- ▶ **BE ACCOUNTABLE.** Be a role model. Try announcing what you are doing on your device every time you use it and ask your teen to do this, too. For example, say, “I’m checking my messages to see what time my meeting starts tomorrow.” Describing what you are doing on your devices helps you and your teen use your phone only for activities that you feel are valuable to spend time doing.
- ▶ **TAKE CHARGE.** Remove app notifications on your smartphone, so you choose when to check your phone instead of your phone choosing for you. Look up apps that help you limit your screen time and choose one that works for you and your family.



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