

## No phones, No TV, No Computers, Oh My!

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Don't stress! Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- Have some designated “device-free zones” such as bedrooms, dinner table, and car rides.
- Rediscover some of the games that have been tucked away in the closet, or have each family member be in charge of one idea for a family night each week.
- Help your kids check out audiobooks at the library or subscribe to Audible.
- Download apps or set controls with your cellular provider that allow parents to have preset allowable internet use.
- Set the limit that handheld devices are only charged 1 time a week to help your child ration their time.
- Purchase a very small data plan to limit screen use outside of the home. Consider having fewer TVs, devices, and monthly subscriptions like Netflix and HBOGo.



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## Managing Screen Time

You started out with good intentions. You read the parenting magazines, the blog posts, heck you even looked up what the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends when it comes to screen time (Absolutely no exposure for children under the age of 2, and no more than 2 hours per day for older children).

BUT . . .

It's winter. It's cold. It's rainy. Everyone is inside. ALL. THE. TIME. And you've stopped keeping track of how much time your kids are spending in front of a screen. In fact, it's gotten so bad that you might even be tempted to fib if someone asked how much screen time you allow.

Don't worry. Many of us have suffered the same lapse in screen time-vigilance when the weather goes from outside joy to inside gloom. However, the unintended consequences of screen time gluttony is far reaching, potentially affecting our children's physical health, home and classroom behavior, lessening the opportunity to choose healthy outlets during times of perceived boredom.

As parents, we know that limiting screen time is a must, but you might be surprised to hear that our kids think it is important too. Parenting Paradox went to our resident experts, students in college, to ask them how screen time and limits shaped who they are today.

## One Additional Tip

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Always keep in mind: our kids are watching us, learning from us, emulating us. If we are distracted from parenting with our own screens, what message are we sending? We adults justify screen use with the thought that what we are doing on our device is “important” and time-sensitive. But kids have the same defense for their use. In their world, it’s life or death if they don’t maintain their snapchat streak or kill that zombie. Minimizing screen use helps communicate clearly that we are important to each other. Every time we put down our devices and engage in interaction, we fill that need for connection.

Setting limits on screen time is a challenge, maintaining consistency with those limits is an even bigger challenge. When you feel those moments of struggle or even defeat, remember the voices of our college students who continuously state how important it was for their parents to define boundaries when it came to their technology usage.

**There is definitely a happy medium between learning to make use of technology and always being on it.** student, Washington and Lee University

### *Unintended Consequence #1: Decreased Cooperation and Increased Moodiness*

By draining the bank of your child’s mental energy with high visual and cognitive input, our kids can struggle to properly process their internal and external environments. When this happens, even the most mundane requests can seem like big demands and end in unwarranted arguments and total meltdowns. Why? Research shows a dopamine surge occurs when we use technology; in other words, our brains feel a sense of pleasure from video games, number of likes, snapchat streaks. Taking away that technology from our children equates to taking away what their brain reads as a conduit for happiness. So the perceived “need” for screen time is magnified.

**I think I spent a lot more time than I should have on screens because it was easier, took less effort, and made me less anxious, but then I felt distant from others.** student, Kenyon College

### *Unintended Consequence #2: Decreased Practice with Navigating Social Situations*

Some experts assert that using digital devices as distractors to occupy kids during day-to-day tasks might prevent them from learning how to regulate boredom, distress, and other impulses and emotions. Instead of being actively involved in making up games or creating ideas to entertain themselves, they turn to screens for entertainment. In addition, as the movie **Screenagers** discusses, many young people use screens to avoid awkward social situations and to fill lonely times.

As a recent study from UCLA shows, middle school-aged children who have minimized exposure to screens scored much higher at recognizing nonverbal emotional cues (facial expressions, body language, gestures), an important skill for navigating relationships. In effect, when not given opportunities to interact more with others, we can expect our children to lag in developing social and emotional proficiency.

**I wasn't allowed to watch TV/Netflix during the week, but looking back, I'm so glad. I was outside a lot and was really healthy and fit.** student, Emory University

### *Unintended Consequence #3: Decreased Physical Activity*

Time outdoors, especially interacting with nature, can provide opportunities for sustained attention, lowered stress, and reduced aggression. According to the NCBI, twice as many children and three times as many adolescents meet the criteria for obesity based on body mass index scores than just 30 years ago. If our kids are in front of a screen, then they aren't outside playing tag, moving around, getting their heart rates up. Instead, they are inside, exploring a virtual world, sedentary. While limiting screen time does not directly correlate to increased physical activity, the time in front of a screen displaces the time available for physical activity. Being active improves mood, encourages creativity, and promotes better health. And having the kids outside instead of inside does wonders for parents who might need some uninterrupted alone time.

### *The Light at the End of the Tunnel*

If done correctly, providing proper limitations to screen time can produce deeper sleep, a brighter and more even mood, better focus and organization, and increased physical activity. Parents need to begin the process of limiting screen time early by engaging in discussions with their children, defining the values of the family, and generating a plan that is clearly communicated and consistently executed. If you didn't start this process early, it's never too late to establish your family's device policy. Consider using a contract to help provide structure and guidance to your plan: <http://www.screenagersmovie.com/contracts-1/>. While you may experience some push back at first, the benefits of this decision will soon prevail. None of the college kids we interviewed reflected on their childhood and said they wished they spent more time gaming and liking posts on their phone.