

A Parent's Guide to Demystifying Screen Time



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How Much Screen Time is Okay for My Kids?

Screens are a constant part of daily life and it's important to set guidelines to keep screen time at healthy levels. But how do we know how much time spent on smart phones, tablets, or other screens is too much?

The American Academy of Pediatrics defines screen time as any time spent using digital media for entertainment, and recommends the following screen time guidelines for children:

"The AAP reinforces its existing recommendations on limiting cell phone use for children and teenagers. The AAP also reminds parents that cell phones are not toys and are not recommended for infants and toddlers to play with."

– American Academy of Pediatrics



For children **18 months to 24 months**, parents should choose high-quality programming and watch with their children.



For children **2 to 5**, limit screen time to one hour per day of high-quality programming.



For children **6 and up**, establish consistent limits on the time spent using media and the types of media.

Screen time is any activity that involves a digital device with a **screen**, including but not limited to smartphones, tablets, computers, TV and video games.



According to the BBC's report on the Connected Kids survey by market researcher Childwise, kids aged five to 16 are spending an average of **6.5 hours** a day in front of a screen. That's twice as much screen time than in 1995.

It may come as no surprise that teens accumulate the greatest amount of screen time. Teenage boys average **8 hours** and teenage girls aren't trailing too far behind with roughly **7.5 hours** spent in front of a screen. Younger kids, aged 5 to 10, average about **4.5 hours** in front of a TV.

“The main difference from the 1990s is that then TV and magazines were the main ways for connecting kids to the media and now they have different devices from tablets, mobiles, games consoles and they have a much higher screen time.”

-Research executive Matthew Nevard

20% of 18-month-old children average of **28 minutes of screen time** each day.



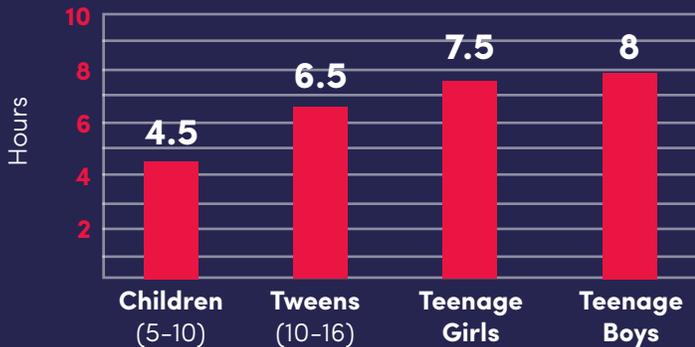
Source: Common Sense Media, Media Use by Kids Age Zero to Eight, 2017



Among kids ages 5 to 12, **YouTube** is used by **89%** and **Minecraft** is played by **63%**.

Source: Insight Strategy Group

Time Spent in Front of Screens per Day



Sources: Connected Kids Survey, Childwise

Screen Time and Health



Female teens ages 13 to 18 are more susceptible to **depression & suicide** as an effect of screen time.

Source: San Diego State University, 2017

Teens and Screen Time

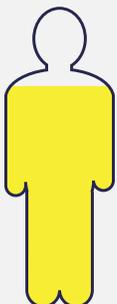


50% of teens feel addicted to their mobile devices.



78% of teens report checking their devices hourly.

Source: Common Sense Media, Technology Addiction: Concern, Controversy, and Finding Balance, 2016



72% of all teens spend time with friends via social media.

57% of teens make friends online.



Source: PEW Research Center, Teens, Technology and Friendships, 2015



Every **30-minute session** of screen time was linked to a **49%** increase of expressive speech delay.

Source: 2017 Pediatric Academic Societies, 2017

How Screen Time Affects Children's Brains

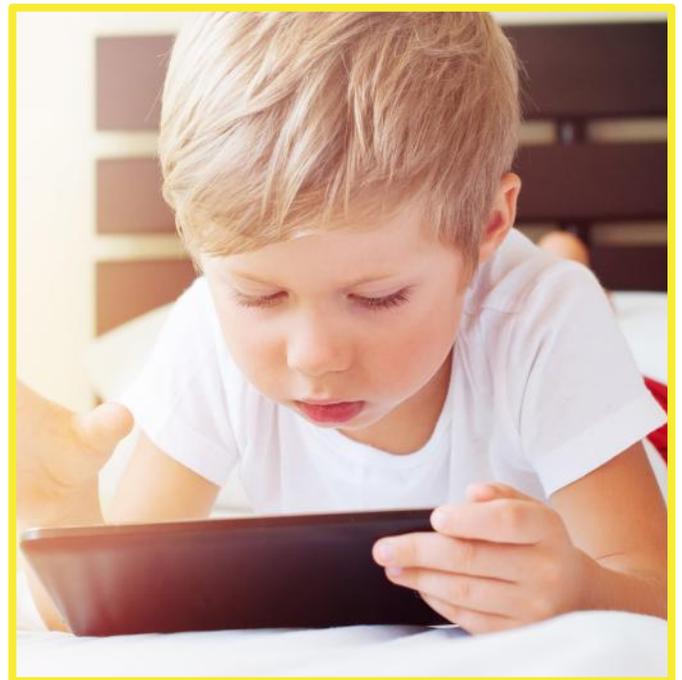
Technology has become an important aspect of how kids interact with the world around them. They have knowledge at their fingertips and can communicate with people all over the world.

However, smartphones can also have physical effects on health including inhibiting sleep and information recall. Below, we explore the ways smartphone use can impact your child's development.

Distraction

Media multitasking and hyper-connectivity makes it harder for kids to focus on one thing, whether it's a conversation with friends, dinner with the family or homework. Smartphones are a distraction. Because the presence of a phone entices the owner to wonder, "What's going on in the digital world?"

For teens active on social media, this can mean inspiring FOMO, or Fear Of Missing Out from what's trending socially and happening with their friends digitally. To help your kids from being distracted by smartphones, consider asking them to leave their phone in another room when they're doing focused activities like homework.



The Google Effect

Finding information has become easier than ever since we can search for any information we need at any time. Because information is so easy to find, we are more likely to remember the source than the actual information, which is referred to as "the Google Effect," and also known as digital amnesia.

Our ability to research any topic is a huge benefit, but studies have shown that our capacity for information recall can be negatively affected. Survey results from Kaspersky show that "91% of consumers can easily admit their dependency on the Internet and devices as a tool for remembering and an extension of their brain."



Compulsion Loops

Gaming apps can be a lot fun, but when your kids want to play Fortnite or Minecraft all the time, they become an issue for parents. Have you ever wondered why won't your kids put down the games?

Apps like Candy Crush are designed to keep people playing. When players achieve small goals, like winning a level, your brain gives you a burst of dopamine, which is a neurotransmitter that controls the reward and pleasure centers of the brain. Players also receive dopamine when they reach new levels or gain power-ups and together, these form a compulsion loop that compels users to continue playing.



Blue Light

Blue light from screens can affect your sleep cycle and quality of sleep because blue light delays the release of melatonin, a hormone that is linked to the sleep cycle and circadian rhythm. Additionally, melatonin is released in response to darkness and using devices that emit blue light at night time can make it harder to fall asleep.



To reduce the impact of blue light on your child's sleep, it's recommended that you don't use devices for one to two hours before bed. Most smartphones now also let you adjust the blue light by increasing the color warmth of the screen. For example, iPhones have a "Night Shift" mode that automatically changes the color of your screen at a set time every night.

The Risks of Too Much Screen Time

According to Pew Research Center, **92%** of teens go online **every day**. As parents, we've likely had discussions with our teens regarding addiction to drugs or alcohol. But how many of us have had the conversations with our teens about addiction to technology? How many of us, as parents, may even struggle with a similar addiction?

If you're concerned that your child is spending too much time on their phone, tablet, or video game console, don't worry, there are ways to help.

Signs of Technology Addiction

The more time teens spend connecting with their screens, the less time they're connecting with real life relationships, deepening their communication and empathy. And, according to a study by Common Sense Media, **50%** of teens feel addicted to their devices. Some signs of tech addiction include:

- Excessive use of devices
- Emotional or physical difficulty being away from their devices
- Relationship problems because of an overabundance of use

The more time teens spend connecting with their screens, the less time they're connecting with real-life relationships.



50% of teens feel addicted to their devices.



36% of families with teens report daily arguing over screen time.

4 Steps to Overcoming Tech Addiction

Technology is an ever-present, and often useful, part of your teen's life, and ultimately, it's unrealistic to expect them to completely eliminate their tech use. So, the question remains: how do you help your teen strike a healthier balance?

1. Set an Example

If you're concerned by the amount of time your kids spend online, then try evaluating your own digital habits. Increased awareness of everyone's screen time, including your own, will be beneficial for your family dynamics.

2. Engage Your Teen in Conversation

Attempt to combat the effects of overexposure to technology by engaging your kids in thoughtful conversation. Ask what they're reading online or listening to and translate it to a real-life interaction. Learning little insights will keep you in tune with what's going on in their lives and will strengthen your family's overall communication.



3. Establish Boundaries

Remember, your teen's brain is still developing and setting limits for themselves may be something they struggle with. Establish "no technology zones" in the house for example at dinnertime, between the hours of 4-6 pm, or for an hour before bed.

4. Educate and Understand

Help your teen understand the risks and potential harm that overexposure to technology can have. Their environment influences their development and if our teen's environment is primarily technology driven, it can impact them both cognitively and socially.

The Benefits of Screen Time

In today's world, which is increasingly more dependent on electronics, it can be challenging to remember we're still in the early phase of truly understanding technology's risks and benefits to our youth.

There are many articles out there that discuss the detrimental effects of excessive screen time, especially in early developmental years, but screen time also has benefits including educational, social and creative impacts.

Educational

Many apps and online games include educational components encouraging further development of reading and math skills. In fact, regular use of educational apps can further solidify learning from the classroom and improve skills while combining learning and fun.

Popular Educational Apps for Kids



ABC Mouse



Duolingo



Mathway

Social

The social benefits of screen time include building language and comprehension skills, which is particularly beneficial for kids with developmental delays or behavioral issues. The Pew Research Center reports that **57%** of teens make friends online, which supports the fact that kids are also using apps and social media platforms to network and meet people.

When monitored and done safely, this can be beneficial for shy teens and can encourage them to build relationships with peers, classmates and neighbors, as well as encouraging them to build a positive digital reputation.

Popular Social Media & Communication Apps for Teens



Snapchat



TBH



Instagram

Creative

Children can be exposed to a variety of creative outlets through technology, through photo, video, and gaming apps. Minecraft, in particular, has shown an increase in cognitive and other creative skill-building for children. A study by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that children who play action-oriented video games can experience:

- Higher spatial resolution in visual processing
- Ability to focus their attention more quickly and accurately
- Increase in rapid decision making
- More efficiency in neural processing
- Increase in creativity

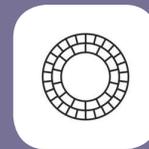
Popular Creative Apps for Kids



Minecraft



Boomerang



VSCO

“We know that kids who play video games and use technology for an hour a day are actually psychologically healthier than kids who spend 3 or more hours a day with video games and also psychologically healthier than kids who don’t spend any time at all.”

– Dr Randy Kulman, Learning Works for Kids

What's the Right Age for My Child to Get a Tablet or Smartphone?

First things first: you need to know that there is no “right” age for a child to get their first smartphone. However, there are many factors that may influence your decision to hand your child a cell phone and those could include:

- **Need for communication before, during or after school**
- **The ability for your child to contact you in an emergency (or vice versa)**
- **Assistance in coordinating pick-up/drop-off details for school or extracurricular events**
- **Extended trips, summer camp or overnight stays at friends' houses**
- **Weekend or joint custody with a co-parent**
- **The ability for kids to talk to school friends without borrowing your own device**

There are numerous studies and parenting reports suggesting appropriate ages for smartphone ownership, but the average age is roughly **10 years old**.

Tablets, however, are accessible to kids at a much younger age since many families have a shared device that younger kids can use to watch cartoons or [YouTube](#) videos. Additionally, once they reach school age they will have more exposure to tablets from an educational standpoint. This doesn't necessarily mean that they are ready for their own tablet, but they will have exposure to them in the classroom.

The most important thing to consider when deciding whether or not to purchase a smartphone or tablet for your child is this: **Will it be beneficial for them?**

If your child is not responsible or mature enough to handle caring for an expensive piece of electronics on their own, then you may want to continue with a shared device or a child-proof version with limited capabilities.

By laying out your expectations, teaching them responsible digital behavior and modeling with your own good habits, you can influence your child's online behavior positively as they grow older.



5 Ways to Know if Your Child is Ready for Their Own Device

1. They are responsible enough to be accountable for the device.

This includes taking care of it physically, keeping it charged, protected and preventing it from getting damaged, lost or stolen to the best of their ability.

2. They are mature enough to understand that there are rules and expected behaviors.

Along with signing a **First Smartphone Contract**, your child should understand that having their own phone is a privilege and can be taken away if misused.

3. You trust them.

Kids will make mistakes, but as long as you trust that they know right from wrong and make good decisions, they may be ready to handle the responsibility of their own device.

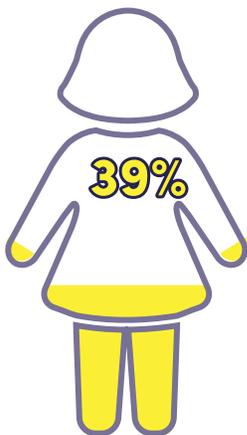
4. They aren't easily influenced by peer pressure.

Many kids are influenced by their classmates and peers, but if you suspect your child is easily swayed by other's opinions and actions, they may not be ready to have a device of their own. This is especially important considering that young children with phones are at a higher risk of cyberbullying, especially those in third and fourth grades.

5. You have open lines of communication.

Being able to report dangerous or questionable things they may come across with their own smartphone or tablet is crucial. Again, their safety is of the utmost importance and having a child who trusts you enough to tell you about cyberbullying, strangers, threats or inappropriate content is a necessity.

Educate your child of the potential risks a connected device has and setting clear expectations and guidelines for proper device and online use.



of kids get a social media account at **11.4 years old**.



got a social media account when they were younger than **10**.



is the average age for a child getting their first smartphone.

How to Balance Screen Time for Your Family

So, what can you do to effectively manage and monitor screen time? Here are a few practical ways to balance screen time and tech use in your household.

Create a Family Media Contract

By using a **Family Media Contract**, you can set clear rules for your family's screen time use and teach your kids digital responsibility and accountability.



Designate Media-Free Family Time

Unplugging as a family can help strengthen your communication and keep you in tune with what's going on in your children's lives. Dinner time is a great place to start and all family members need to place phones out of reach - including Mom and Dad.

Identify Screen-Free Zones

For example, designate the dining room, bathrooms, and bedrooms as rooms in the home where media is not permitted. This will help your family not only target their screen time use in public locations, reducing the possibility of risky behavior, but will also allow your family detox areas away from technology.



Create a Screen Time Reward System

Institute a system in which screen time is earned by requiring 30 minutes of reading or an unplugged family activity in exchange for 30 minutes of screen time. Another option is swapping 15 minutes using an educational app in exchange for 15 minutes of an entertainment app, video game or social media.

Be Consistent

It's incredibly important to consistently monitor the amount of time your child spends in front of a screen. Depending on the age of your child, set an appropriate time limit and content limit on the material your child is viewing. It's equally important that, as a parent, you ensure the material your child is viewing is age-appropriate and offers educational or social value.



Communicate Freely

Communication is essential for establishing and maintaining a healthy relationship with your child regarding any topic, including technology. Make every effort to understand what your child is watching, why they like it and what they're getting out of it.

Open lines of communication can help to de-escalate a difficult discussion by establishing a trusting and collaborative relationship with your child.

Learn Together

We encourage you to join forces with your child and learn together by discovering which apps and games are popular, fun or helpful to use as a family. This will not only increase your own knowledge base but will give you something to bond over with your kids. For information about which apps are safe for your kids to use, access our [App Advisor](#).



Screen Time Rules for Summer vs. Year-Round

For kids, summer vacation is a time filled with no alarm clocks, late nights, and a lot of downtime. This means that your household screen time rules should be adjusted to reflect the changes in their schedule so they're realistic, while also limiting their time spent glued to a screen.

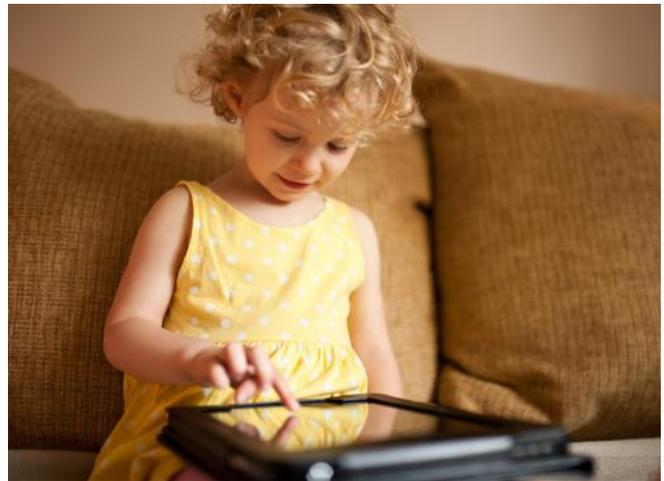
Update Your Family Media Contract

When schedules drastically change, it may be time to take another look at your household screen time rules. Consider updating your existing [Family Media Contract](#) and your teen's [Social Media Contract](#) to reflect their summertime activity including their digital curfews.

Consider Their Downtime

Depending on their age, your kids may not have as much structure as they're used to during the school year. And while you may be working through the warm summer months, kids are excited for a break from tests, homework and extracurricular schedules.

This doesn't mean that they should run completely wild and free, though, so think of fun projects around the house or nurture a bucket list hobby to help them fill their days.



Make the Most of the Weather

Summer is a great time to encourage kids to go outside and enjoy a variety of warm weather activities with family and friends. From [app-assisted scavenger hunts](#) to road trips to summer camp, remind your kids that there is more to life than what they see on-screen.



Get Physical

If a beach vacation is in your plans, sign your kids up for surfing lessons to keep them active and occupied. Planning a staycation? Check with your local community center for summer activities – many communities offer interest-focused camps, from sports to the arts, for teens to participate in at reduced rates for residents.

For times when your teen is at home, establish balance by requiring them to have some type of physical activity (chores, walk, or active exercise) before having downtime online.



Make Face-to-Face Time a Priority

Make in-person interaction with others a requirement before your teen hops online. This can be as simple as a quick catch-up conversation with a parent or sibling or a get-together with a friend.

Skip the Location Tagging

While your teen may be tempted to post all of their summer adventures online, establish a no check-in rule from the very beginning. Not only does checking-in advertise your vacant home while on vacation, it also reveals your child's whereabouts to whoever is able to view their accounts.

Lights Out

Set a cut-off time at night for your teen to unplug and turn off their screens. Yes, they're likely going to be keeping later hours over their summer break, but that doesn't mean they should be on their devices all night.



6 Strategies to Create an Unplugged Bedtime Routine

Ensuring a good night's sleep is important for all kids, and by instituting an unplugged bedtime routine, your child can learn to break away from their favorite devices and get the restful night's sleep they need for their brain growth and development. Here are some tips you can use to help establish a strong sleep pattern for your child.

1. Remove screens from the bedroom.

Not only is it safer for your child to have a bedroom without a computer, television, tablet or smartphone, it's also more conducive to sleep.

Research has linked screen time before bed with poor sleep and higher body mass indexes (BMIs), which are indicative of obesity.

2. Start screen-free time early.

In addition to removing screens from the bedroom, it's suggested to begin screen-free time one to two hours prior to bedtime.



3. Use a basic alarm clock.

Try using a non-digital alarm clock to help your child get the best rest possible. By not ending their night and beginning their days with a bright screen, you can add a little distance between them and technology, plus it's also a great way to teach the little ones how to tell time!

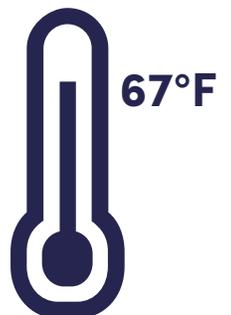
4. Survey the sleep environment.

A quick temperature check is an easy way to see how your child is most comfortable at bedtime. If they are too hot or too cold, it could stimulate them to stay awake, so take note of their preference and work into your nightly routine. The National Sleep Foundation recommends bedroom temperatures to be within 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit for optimal sleep.

Also consider the noise level inside and outside of your child's bedroom, as sounds of traffic, weather or other factors outside of your home could cause them to stay awake.

“Technology before bed is associated with less sleep and higher BMIs. [Our study] also saw this technology use being associated with more fatigue in the morning, which circling back, is another risk factor for higher BMIs. So, we’re seeing a loop pattern forming.”

-Caitlyn Fuller, Global Pediatric Health



5. Try soothing activities.

Bath time, reading, coloring, or a calming back rub can go a long way for a restful night's sleep. Lorna Jean King, the founder of the Children's Center for Neurodevelopmental Studies suggests, "If a bath or shower is an evening activity, follow with five minutes of a towel rub-down, being sure to use downward strokes in the direction the hair grows. Pressure touch is calming.

After the child is in bed, a backrub may also be soothing."



6. Be consistent.

Set a bedtime that allows enough time to unwind through your child's nightly routine including at least the minimum number of recommended hours of sleep for your child's age.

For guidance on how many hours of sleep your child should get, reference these recommendations from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine:

- Infants **4 months to 12 months** should sleep **12 to 16 hours** per 24 hours (including naps) on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
- Children **1 to 2 years** of age should sleep **11 to 14 hours** per 24 hours (including naps) on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
- Children **3 to 5 years** of age should sleep **10 to 13 hours** per 24 hours (including naps) on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
- Children **6 to 12 years** of age should sleep **9 to 12 hours** per 24 hours on a regular basis to promote optimal health.
- Teenagers **13 to 18 years** of age should sleep **8 to 10 hours** per 24 hours on a regular basis to promote optimal health.

Digital Detox Checklist



A digital detox is one way to take back control of technology use in your family's life. It may be difficult, especially for kids who are used to unlimited screen time but taking an extended break from digital devices can help your children balance their tech habits.

Detoxes should last a minimum of 24 hours, but the longer it lasts, the more it reveals and potentially repairs. This digital detox checklist will help you take an important step toward fighting screen addiction.

- Plan in Advance**
Find a time that everyone in the family can shut down their devices for at least 24 hours.
- Write Down a Mission Statement**
Put into words the reason you are detoxing to remind yourself and your family why the detox is important.
- Keep Your Family's Devices Stored Together**
This will make it easier to keep track of all devices and curb potential rule breaking.
- Let People Know You'll Be Offline**
Tell anyone who regularly contacts you of your detox plans, so they understand that you'll be away from your devices.
- Plan Activities to Enjoy Time Away from Devices**
Enjoy your time away from the digital world with unplugged activities that will teach your family to find peaceful and fun moments away from screens.
- Prepare to Log Back On**
There will undoubtedly be a barrage of notifications and alerts when you log back on. Since this may be overwhelming and overstimulating, be patient and take it step-by-step.
- Schedule a Regular Detox**
Whether you want one monthly, bi-weekly, or weekly, a regular detox can help streamline your thoughts, re-focus your goals and balance your normally tech-riddled life.

Digital Contract for Your Family

- Tablet Computer/Laptop Phone Video Game Console

You Agree To:

- Only watch videos/visit websites that my parents approve.
- Not download anything without permission first.
- Only spend ____ minutes on the tablet/phone/computer/game each day.
- I can use the devices between the hours of _____ only.
- Tell a parent if I see something that makes me feel uncomfortable.
_____ rooms are off-limits for using any device.
- Ask permission before purchasing anything online.
- All devices should charge overnight in _____.
- I promise not to use any devices during breakfast, lunch or dinner.
- I won't let screen time distract me from homework and my favorite hobbies, like _____.
- Not share any personal information or photos without approval.

We Agree To:

- Watch along with my child & interact while they view videos and apps.
- Keep family meals unplugged.
- Be a good digital citizen and teach my kids to do the same.
- Won't text and drive.
- Review privacy settings with the family.
- Keep all device passwords.
- Turn off all screens _____ minutes before bedtime.

(Parent/Guardian Signature)

(Child Signature)



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