

Practical Tips for Managing Technology in the Home

Pediatric Healthcare, LLC

Digital screened devices can be harmful to your child. The early and frequent use of smartphones and tablets can interfere with the healthy brain development of the child. Video gaming can be powerfully addictive to the teenager, especially males. The frequent use of social media by teens can lead to anxiety, depression and general discontentment. Addiction to pornography among adolescents and young adults is sky rocketing due to easy access on the Internet and mobile devices.

Digital technology is here to stay, so how will you manage it and its effects upon your family?

Win your child's trust. Invest in your relationship. Make it clear that it is your child's heart and your relationship with him that is the most important. Therefore, if the use of a digital device is harming either of these, it will be taken away. If your children know you have their best interest in mind, they are more likely to submit to your leadership.

Slow down and seek to keep life simple for the children, especially when they are young. This will be hard with all the digital temptations surrounding you. Keep the screens turned off most of the time. Encourage reading and active play. Be available to your children and create opportunities for conversation.

Don't be intimidated. You may feel overwhelmed by the complexity of digital devices and the peer pressure your child is under to use them. Take action! If you don't monitor their use, no one will. Your child needs your oversight, especially during adolescence. The unlimited content on the Internet and the overpowering pressures of social media will overwhelm your child without your guidance.

Accept your responsibility of being THE parent. This means you have authority over all digital devices used by your child, even when it *appears* to invade his privacy. You also have the right and responsibility to occasionally review the content of your child's devices.

Use of a digital device is a privilege, not a right. This privilege must be earned by your child with the display of responsible behavior, and it can be removed by any irresponsible use of the device.

Don't underestimate the negative content these devices can bring into your child's life. Examples include: Uncensored texting with peers, lude pictures (sexting), derogatory comments, foul language, gossip, pornography, predatory adult exposure, and access to deplorable content on the Internet.

Don't assume your child is immune. Temptation is a powerful force to cause your child to do things he or she would not have dreamed. Your child needs your guidance and oversight from the cradle to college . . . and then some!

Actions for the Family

Don't allow digital devices in bedrooms. The bedroom should be a screen-free sanctuary in order to promote the highest quality sleep. Screens (tablets, phones and TV) in bedrooms are associated with insomnia and poor quality sleep. Only allow computer use (laptop or desktop) in the living areas of the home where monitoring is possible.

Designate screen-free zones in the home. Don't allow mobile devices and TV in the bedrooms and perhaps the dining area.

Designate screen-free times. No device usage during mealtime, during family time, during homework, while in the cars (except on long trips), and one hour prior to bedtime. No video or app game playing on school day evenings and limit it to 1-2 hours on a weekend day.

Set device curfews. “All mobile devices will be turned off at _____ and placed in the kitchen for charging overnight.”

Suggested Time Limits on Total Recreational Screen Time

Child’s Age	Limits on a Weekday*	Limits on a Weekend day	Device**
Less than 2 years	Avoid all intentional viewing	Avoid all intentional viewing	All devices
2 – 6 years	1 hour	1 hour	All devices
6-12 years	½ hour	1-2 hours	All devices
12 years or older	½-1 hour	1-2 hours	All devices

* These limits on weekday limits assumes school attendance for at least a half day after age 5 years.

** Devices includes television, computer, tablet, and smartphone.

Actions for the Child under 10 years of age

Delay your child’s use of electronic (screened) devices. Resist using a tablet or smartphone as a “baby-sitter” to occupy your toddler or young child. Avoid intentional exposure to screens (TV, computer, video, smartphone, or tablet) before 2 years of age. After 2 years, allow limited time (1 hr. or less) watching quality programming on the family TV or playing quality apps on a family tablet. Ideally, watch the TV or play the games with your child. Wait until the following ages (or later) to allow personal possession of a device: Tablet-**10 yrs**; Cell phone (no data plan)-**13yrs**; Smartphone-**15yrs**.

Encourage outside play as an alternative to screen time. Screen-free, active play is healthier for the mind and the body.

Avoid (at least limit) using a phone or tablet as a “pacifier” for your young child. While it is tempting to give a mobile device to a toddler when calmness is desired (restaurant, church service, waiting room), it does not teach or train self-control and often does the opposite. Outbursts commonly follow the turning-off of the device, and next time your child will likely protest until you give the device again. Prepare for outings by bringing coloring books, toy cars, dolls, or books for your young child. If your phone is never an option, it will not be requested.

Activate parental protection or filters on all WiFi devices. Turn on filters and limits on all devices that access WiFi, including a child’s iPod.

Be Internet cautious. The Internet can be a useful resource for the family, but it can also be a source of dark, degrading material for a child. Parents, consider the following measures to protect your child.

1. Only allow computer or tablet use in the living areas of the home where monitoring is possible; *not* in a child’s bedroom.
2. Set parental control settings on all devices: computers, tablets (iPads and iPods) and smartphones.
3. Install an Internet filter or monitoring program on devices. These are easy to install and reasonably priced. These programs allow a parent to limit a child’s access to certain Internet content. See the list of suggested programs below.

Turn off the screens on school day evenings. For a healthier mind, encourage children to read more and watch screens less. TV, tablets, video games, and the recreation on the computer quickly consume time in the evenings and lead to too little exercise and late nights. Limit TV and free screen time to 30 minutes or less on school day nights. No video gaming.

Delay video console and tablet gaming until 8 years of age or later. Restrict it to weekends *only*, and limit the time to ½-1 hour a day. Encourage sports or educational games. Avoid online gaming.

Co-view TV programs and co-play video games and tablet apps with your children. This allows for monitoring and explanation of content to them.

Actions for the Child 10+ years of age

Limit screen-time on school day evenings. Limit TV and free screen time to 1 hour or less on school day nights to allow time for outside play, homework and to bed on time.

Restrict video and tablet gaming to weekends *only*, and limit the time to 1-2 hours a day. Avoid violent games. Review and even play every game you allow on the device. No online group, or monitor it very closely.

Delay ownership of the devices. Wait until the following ages (or later) to allow personal possession of the device: Tablet- **10 yrs**; Cell phone (no data)-**13yrs**; Smartphone-**15yrs**.

Talk to your child about device use. Let him know that you are trusting him to use it responsibly and here are some guidelines:

- The device use is a privilege, not a right. If the privilege is abused, the device will be taken away.
- As your parents, we have the right to monitor the phone, and this will mean giving up the phone occasionally to us for review.
- You are not to load any apps on the phone without our permission.
- Limit game playing; it can be addictive and very wasteful of your time.
- Enjoy this device. You have earned it.

Manage the Apps on the phone. Set up parental controls on your child's Android and Apple devices to restrict the use of apps. For Android: Go to Settings > Digital Wellbeing and Parental Controls. For the Apple: (1) Go to Settings > General > Restrictions > Enable Restrictions.

Periodically review the apps on your child's phone. Consult websites like Common Sense Media for reviews about age-appropriate apps, games & programs to guide you.

Monitor the devices. Periodically (not every day), request to see your child's device to review its content and history. Ask that your child not delete history records on the device. Strongly consider installing tracking software and browser restrictions on the phone.

Manage any social media allowed. Delay your child's enrollment in social media as long as possible, but no earlier than 13 years of age, which is a requirement with Facebook. If your teen uses Facebook or other social networks, here are some guidelines:

- Open your own account and be "Friends" with your child. View your child's page weekly.
- Know your child's user name and password to monitor his or her account. Warn your child about creating duplicate accounts.
- Review the privacy settings on the social site account and set it to the strictest settings for a young teen.

Teach your child to be wise and polite online:

- Don't share private personal information, i.e. date of birth, SS#, address, and personal photos.
- Don't chat or text with anyone parents don't know or have not approved.
- Don't be rude or bully others. Respect the privacy of others. Don't participate in gossip.
- Teach: Once you send a post or picture, the whole world sees it and it cannot be reversed.
- Don't let it steal your time and energy.
- Be on guard for discontentment! Posts are not always as "perfect" as they appear.

Turn off phones and tablets at bedtime and have your child bring them to a central location in the home (kitchen) for charging overnight. This also provides you an opportunity to review the activity on these devices.

Avoid phone use or texting during homework.

Monitor your child's school-issued computer. If your child is issued a computer from the school and brings it home to use, talk with administration about the installed Internet filter and its limitations. Periodically review the computer history.

Be selective about the movies watched. Watching movies is a popular form of recreation for youth. Movies, however, can subtly influence a child's mind and morals. Don't allow your child watch a movie simply because it is popular. First, review it at MovieGuide.org or PluggedIn.com or CommonSenseMedia.org. If a movie has lots of violence, sex, or bad language, talk with your child about why it is best not to see it. Be a trend setter among parents. Have high standards! Your child will eventually appreciate you for it.

Require a reasonable bedtime on school day nights. Adequate sleep is a key ingredient for a healthy mind and body. Too little sleep can lead to poor concentration at school, forgetfulness, depression, hyperactivity, and general loss of energy. Digital devices can interfere with healthy sleep habits. Assuming a 6-6:30 AM wake up time, a reasonable target bedtime is:

- 2 year old to 6th grade: **7-8 PM**
- 7th to 9th grade **8-9 PM**
- 10-12th grade **9-10 PM**

Homework or an extracurricular event may *occasionally* push this time later, but always aim for the reasonable "target" bedtime.

[Actions for Parents](#)

Your children are watching! Be a good model. Use your devices responsibly.

Limit couch-potato time. Be an industrious, active example to your children.

Keep your phone in your pocket or purse during idle times. Talk with your child instead.

When driving with children in the car, don't use your phone; talk to your children instead.

Have restrictions about the use of your phone by your children, esp. toddlers.

Put your phone down! Make eye contact during conversation with your child. Show her your interest for what she has to say. Ask for same respect from her, as well.

Designate screen-free times for yourself. In order to give the family your undivided attention, commit to no screen usage on weekdays from 5PM until 8PM, when the children go to bed.

Limit your social media browsing to times when children are not present. Be on guard for your own discontentment!

[Parent Resources](#)

- [The Teen's Guide to Social Media](#) by Jonathan McKee
- [Good Pictures, Bad Pictures](#) by KA Jenson and G Poyner
- *The Impact of Media Use and Screen time of Children.* American College of Pediatricians. (ACPeds.org)
- AAP Family Media Plan. Accessed: www.healthychildren.org

[Device Monitoring Resources](#)

- **Norton Family-** Parental control software. www.Norton.com
- **Circle Home Plus-** A parental control device for the home WiFi. www.MeetCircle.com
- **Net Nanny-** Internet filter & parental controls www.NetNanny.com
- **Covenant Eyes-** Internet filter and tracking www.CovenantEyes.com

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