

Setting Screen Time Limits for Children and Teens



If your child is having a hard time staying away from a screen, you're not alone. Many parents and caregivers struggle with the same problem. Screens are everywhere. It's easy for them to grab your child's attention. Experts advise that kids and teens take breaks from screens so they have plenty of time for other healthy activities. Luckily, there are lots of ways you can help your child take some time off from a device.

How do I know if my child is spending too much time on a screen?

It can be hard to tell when to take a screen break. Rather than think about how many hours a day your child uses a screen, think about how screens affect their health in the big picture. Here are some questions to get you started:

- Does my child get plenty of sleep?
- Do they get exercise every day?
- Does their diet seem balanced, including fruits and vegetables?
- Are they able to keep up with schoolwork?
- Do they get meaningful in-person time with friends and family?
- Do they enjoy nonscreen activities, like music, sports, or crafts?

If all the answers are yes, then screen time likely isn't a problem. But if tech gets in the way of your child's sleep, mood, school, or relationships, reducing screen time can help.

Setting limits

The limits you set depend on your child's age and lifestyle. Talk with your child's healthcare provider to learn more. Here is advice from pediatric expert groups:

- **Children younger than 18 months.** The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) advises that young children stay off screens or only see screens when an adult is standing by to teach and talk (for example, video-chatting with family).
- **Children ages 18 to 24 months.** If you want to introduce screens to children in this age group, the AAP advises educational programs or apps. Younger children learn best alongside an adult, so use screens together. Don't give children this age screen time alone. Set time limits like 1 hour of screen time daily. Make sure to emphasize nonscreen activities like reading, talking, and playing together.
- **Preschool children ages 2 to 5 years.** The AAP advises limiting non-educational screen time to about 1 hour per day. Find other activities that are healthy for their bodies and minds. View or play media with your child.
- **School-aged children ages 5 and older.** Screen time limits will help your child get enough sleep (8 to 12 hours, depending on their age) and physical activity (1 hour per day). Set media-free times together, like during meals or before bed. Create media-free places like the dinner table or the bedroom. This provides structure. In addition, you can use extra screen time to reward positive behavior. Examples are getting ready for school on time, doing chores, or completing homework.

It's normal for kids to push back against new rules. They might get upset or ask over and over for more screen time. Usually, they will get used to a rule within a couple of weeks. During that time, it's important to keep the rule consistent. Try to stop debate about the rule. Once it's set, it's not up for discussion.

Once the rule is pretty firmly in place, you might have to make exceptions sometimes. That's OK! Sometimes giving kids extra screen time once in a while helps you take care of yourself or get other things done. Being

flexible is the best way to keep everyone's stress levels down. Just let your kids know it's a special case and not to expect extra screen time every day.

The limits may change over time as life changes and your children age. It's up to you to decide.

Other tips for reducing screen time

- **Brainstorm nonscreen activities.** Along with limits, a big selection of nonscreen activities can redirect your child's attention. Make a list of things they like to do, such as reading, riding a bicycle, playing chess, crafting, or spending time with a pet. This way, your child has lots of options to pick from if they get bored.
- **Set screen time limits for yourself.** Help your child with limits by being the example. Try putting away your own devices during set times, like at the dinner table, to support your child as they adapt to new rules.
- **Check out the Family Media Plan.** Created by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the [Family Media Plan](#) helps your family set limits based on each child's age, health, personality, and developmental stage. The plan can be changed for school breaks or as children get older.

Keep working at it

Staying off screens can be tough for children. But keeping them involved in other activities and ensuring they get enough rest can improve their mental and physical health. You can help your child find a good balance. This will allow them to stay active and connect with their community. It will also help them to develop many skills that will benefit them throughout their life.

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