

How to Set Limits on Screen Time and Internet Use

Now that our lives and those of our kids are settling into a more normal routine, it makes sense to reevaluate rules around internet use, which for most of us had relaxed during the height of the pandemic.

The experts at the [Child Mind Institute](#), a member of the [Morgan Stanley Alliance for Children's Mental Health](#), have some tips to help you understand how your family uses screens, set reasonable expectations for time spent with them, and support your children as they learn to abide by new rules. What follows are some actions you can take to help ensure you can identify and solve any issues.

1 Identify potential problems by asking yourself these questions:

- Is my child sleeping enough, eating a balanced diet and getting exercise every day?
- Do they spend quality time with family and keep in touch with friends?
- Are they thriving and engaged in school and keeping up with homework?
- Do they regularly spend time pursuing hobbies and extracurriculars that they enjoy?

If you answer yes to most of those questions, then it's probably not detrimental if your child occasionally watches an extra episode (or three or five) of their favorite TV show or spends an extra hour or two a week gaming with a new friend. But if screen use is getting in the way of important activities, then it may be time to set some limits.

2 Gather data. Determine how much and for what purposes your family is using the internet by asking yourself these questions:

- How much are you and your children online? (Add up time spent on all online activities, including streaming TV. A good target is 1 hour or less of gaming daily and 1–3 hours or less for streaming video and TV).
- How is internet use helping you and your family? (Include things like remote schooling or connecting with family members who don't live nearby.)
- How is internet use affecting you and your family negatively? Is it causing stress or conflicts or getting in the way of other important activities?

The answers to these questions may reveal patterns in your use that you'd like to change and give you ideas of where limits could be most helpful.

- 3 **Brainstorm alternatives for young kids.** Develop an “activity menu” with your child that lists their favorite non-screen-related hobbies (like crafts, sports, reading or playing with a pet). That way, when they’re feeling bored or overwhelmed, they’ll have already identified a few enticing alternatives to choose from. It doesn’t have to be an organized activity. Hopping on a bike or making a pan of brownies can be fun ways to take a break from time spent online.

- 4 **Keep a schedule.** Designate specific times of the day or week when your kids know they’ll be allowed to use their screens—and when they know they can’t (like at the dinner table). This helps set routines and expectations. Draw up a schedule for yourself as well, in order to both set a good example and give you space for your own tasks and responsibilities.

- 5 **Let your teens weigh in.** When you’re setting rules for older kids, take their concerns and opinions into consideration. For example, they might swear that homework is easier to get done while chatting remotely with a friend. Give their way a trial run, even if you’re skeptical. See what you learn and reevaluate if necessary.

- 6 **Model healthy screen use.** If you make a point of setting aside your own screens during set times, your children will be more likely to do the same. Plus, taking breaks from tech yourself can allow you to schedule more family time together.

- 7 **Have open conversations about screen use.** Make tech use a topic of family conversation. Check in with your kids often about how they are coping with any new rules and let them know they can come to you with questions or concerns.

Read more about helping children navigate screen time in a healthy way in this article from the Child Mind Institute Family Resource Center:

[How to Set Limits on Screen Time](#)



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