

Managing Screen Time

Teens aren't able to fully regulate or self-monitor their own tech use — that's your job as the parent. I'm often asked, "*How much screen time should my child have?*" Instead, I encourage you to reframe the question: **What is screen time taking away from my child?**

Use the following sections to help you decide where adjustments might be needed:

Schoolwork

- **Know what's expected:** Understand your child's homework load based on their age and teacher expectations. This helps you gauge how much screen time is *actually* needed for school.
- **Limit non-school screen time:** When homework is done, encourage offline activities. Kids shouldn't always be plugged in.
- **Create a supervised workspace:** Have your child do schoolwork in a space where you can monitor their focus and progress.
- **Watch for multitasking:** Teens often switch between tasks, but this reduces efficiency and attention span. Help them stay on one task at a time.
- **Keep bedrooms stress-free:** Homework should be done outside of the bedroom. Bedrooms should remain calm, restful spaces for sleep—not places associated with school stress

Social Media

- **Know the platforms:** Familiarize yourself with the social media apps your teen is using. Be aware that they are likely being exposed to adult content.
- **Sit with them:** Spend time with your teen on social media. Teach them how to use it in a healthy and appropriate way.
- **Set clear limits:** Establish boundaries for social media use. Review what they're posting - and do this regularly.
- **Teach, don't punish:** Try to approach social media conversations as opportunities for guidance, not just discipline.
- **Be aware of hidden activity:** Some teens have secret accounts or even extra phones. Stay curious and informed.
- **Limit scrolling time:** Excessive use (more than 1.5 hours a day) has been shown to lower self-esteem, worsen mood, and increase anxiety.

Gaming

- **Too much gaming = too much stimulation:** Excessive gaming can lead to sensory overload, desensitization to violence, reduced empathy, and an overstimulated nervous system.
- **Young brains struggle with hyper-stimulation:** Kids' brains aren't built for the intensity of constant gaming. It can seriously impact their ability to focus and sustain attention.
- **Know who they're talking to:** Your child should only be interacting with people they know in real life. If they aren't, ask questions and stay involved.
- **Support real-life friendships:** If your child's "friends" only exist online, they may need help building in-person social skills. Real-time, face-to-face connection is vital for healthy brain development.
- **Check game content:** Make sure the games your child plays are age-appropriate. Visit www.common sense media.org to check reviews and ratings.

Sleep

- **No screens in bedrooms at night:** This includes phones, tablets, and laptops. Even if they say it's for the alarm – just buy them an actual alarm clock.
- **Power down early:** Ideally, all screens (yes, even for adults!) should be turned off at least 2 hours before bedtime.
- **Sleep matters:** Teens typically need 8–10 hours of sleep; younger kids need closer to 10. Restorative sleep supports learning, boosts mood, reduces stress, and improves problem-solving.
- **Homework late at night?** If your teen regularly stays up late for homework, consider checking in with their teachers. But regardless, prioritize sleep and set a consistent bedtime.

Boundaries:

- **Set clear tech boundaries:** Establish consistent, screen-free times in your home.
- **Recommended non-negotiables:**
 - Tech-free dinner times
 - No screens in bedrooms at night
 - Tech-free car rides
- **Create a family tech contract:** Outline expectations for everyone—including adults. Working from home? Set clear "off" times together.
- **Model what you expect:** Teens are quick to notice double standards. Practice what you preach when it comes to screen time.
- **Be present and available:** If your face is always behind a screen, your teen may not come to you when they need support. Show them what healthy "netiquette" looks like.

Emotional Health

- **Teens need time to figure out who they are:** Identity development requires quiet, reflective moments. Boredom and downtime are valuable – encourage them! (Reminder: *scrolling is not boredom*—it stimulates the brain.)
- **Connect before you correct:** Try to connect emotionally with your teen before jumping in to problem-solve. Most teens want to feel heard and understood – not immediately fixed.
- **Listen more, talk less:** Sometimes, your presence and quiet empathy are more powerful than advice.
- **Build emotional literacy:** Help your teen name and explore their feelings. Guide them in understanding their emotional world, not just reacting to it.
- **Create screen-free opportunities:** Anytime you can unplug, take it. Ideas include:
 - Read a physical book
 - Watch TV *together* in the same room
 - Be playful and silly
 - Write or doodle on paper (try using your non-dominant hand!)
 - Go outside and explore nature
 - Bake something together
 - Use your imagination – daydream, create, or just stare out a window
 - Enjoy quiet moments without needing to “do” anything
 - Go on a city bus adventure
 - Go out for dinner, and don’t take your phones
 - Embrace being unproductive – it's good for the brain and soul

The Best Books About Screen Time:

“The Big Disconnect – Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in The Digital Age”

by Katherine Steiner-Adair

“How to Break Up with Your Phone” by Catherine Price

“Glow Kids” by Nicholas Kardaras

Go to www.screenagersmovie.com and view the Resources Page to find tips, tools, and various parenting apps to also help you manage your devices.