

Creating Online Rules for Your Family

Developing a family social media policy provides personal accountability for the consequences of online behaviors. Talking as a family about internet self-defense and web etiquette also reinforces principles necessary for success offline.

Most families raise kids within a set of values, norms, manners, and beliefs. We know the power of modeling good behavior, problem solving skills, and healthy coping mechanisms. Incorporating these into your family social media policy and online rules personalizes your expectations.

Young people must understand how and why online behavior translates to the real world and the profound impact it can have on their character. Keep a watchful eye on kids' online decision making, and let them practice in this safe space. This will help later in life, when they go to college or enter the workplace and develop interpersonal relationships with others. Follow these steps:

- ▶ **Explore the pros and cons of engaging and over-disclosing on social media platforms.** Discuss how this could impact their future goals and aspirations, like getting into college, advancing their careers and supporting stable relationships with peers and family.
- ▶ **Offer advice and support – not judgment.** Teenagers reason at a different maturity level than adults. Caregivers and parents must help kids feel safe to discuss issues as they surface.



- ▶ **Explain that social media activity lasts forever.** Young people often forget the long-term impact a like, share, or comment may have on their reputation and character. While we all appreciate the accessibility and speed of technology, this can also be detrimental. It takes just a split second to react to something but a lifetime to live with the consequences.

SETTING LIMITS ON SCREEN TIME FOR KIDS & FAMILIES

What Is Screen Time? Screen time is the amount of time an individual spends using devices with screens, like televisions, smartphones, tablets, computers, and video games. All technology has risks and benefits. Seeking balance and setting limits on screen time supports healthy habits for the whole family.

Setting Screen Time Limits

Adopt these tips to develop limits and rules for your family:

- ▶ **Model responsible use of screen time.** Just like in a healthy diet, moderation plays a key role in limiting screen time. Nurturing an environment with healthy boundaries gets



the family less attached to their screens while encouraging better communication and more face-to-face interactions.

Connection is vital for healthy families to work and thrive together. Begin by cutting out bad habits, like texting each other from other rooms in the house or treating screens as rewards, punishment, or babysitters. These small steps reintroduce screens as tools rather than lifelines.

▶ **Remember the power of play and get involved.** Replacing screen time with activity and exercise creates healthy returns. Send kids outdoors in good weather. On rainy days, get creative with arts and crafts projects. Make kids unplug by instituting a no-device rule on family outings to the park or library.

▶ **Take the opportunity to reduce your own device time as well.** Though adults have professional and personal responsibilities that may require checking texts or emails, everyone needs balance. Occasionally leave your phone in your purse, the car, or another room. Doing so will not only help to model balanced habits but also place you front and center in engaging with your family.

▶ **Become a participant in your child's online activity.** When you enjoy screen time with your child, you demonstrate the value of sharing, bonding, team learning, and social

interaction. Kids left alone with devices can experience social isolation and prolonged periods of solitary activity.

They may feel disconnected from building relationships with peers and taking part in healthy physical activity, which can limit their world view. By participating with them, you monitor online activity and show kids your interest in what they are doing.

▶ **Give little ones specific, age-appropriate limits.** Medical and education experts say children younger than 18-24 months should limit digital device time to occasional video chat sessions with parents or loved ones. Children this age are still learning language and interaction. They rely on you for guidance and should not be exposed to screen devices that may have negative effects on development.

Limit children ages 2-5 to one hour per day of educational or learning-based media. Spend that time with your kids, so you can monitor the quality of their information sources.

▶ **Create No-Screen Zones, and be creative!** Setting limits doesn't have to mean creating a list of rules or setting a stopwatch every time a family member touches a device.