

Quick Tips for Balancing Family Technology/Screen Use

1. **Communicate clearly.** Have a family discussion about the importance of balancing screen time in your home with a positive, happy attitude; brainstorm fun non-screen activities together. Have children help by coming up with healthy and reasonable tech rules for the family, but remember YOU have the final say!
2. **Model balanced technology use.** Make a conscious decision to reduce your own screen time, especially in front of your children; show them your priorities. They do notice! Focus on work emails and social media after the kids go to bed.
3. **Put the Xbox and TV remotes out of sight and keep them out of kid's bedrooms.** Putting consoles back in the box when done and storing them in a closet makes playing more intentional; keeping TV remote away from TV helps divert attention to a good book, a family puzzle or going outside. Kids will hide in bedrooms all day if allowed to. Keep TV's out of bedrooms!
4. **NO phones or screens at the dinner table.** Respect this time with your family; a tech basket to collect phones on the kitchen counter works well. This is easy to enforce and beneficial on so many levels.
5. **No screens (gaming or TV) first thing in the morning, right before school or bedtime.** This sets the tone for the rest of the day and research shows the negative effects of screen use before bedtime (sleep issues/not enough sleep).
6. **Do not offer screen time as a reward, or video games as gifts.** The best rewards are time with family/parents! A special keepsake item or item for outdoor use/hobby will be more memorable than a video game.
7. **Keep board games, puzzles, cards, newspapers, magazines,** photo albums and books out in easy view in the kitchen or family room. Same goes for Legos and craft items. If they are put away they will not get used as much. Playing board games/cards is fun and a great bonding activity.
8. **Establish a screen-free day or weekend for your family.** Have a plan! Do something special with your children (go on a hike, make dinner together, camp in the backyard, go to a play/show). The possibilities are endless!
9. **Connect with kids on car rides.** Instead of allowing smart phones or using the DVD system in your car, use this valuable time to connect with your kids or listen to music or books on tape (yes, even on long car rides!).
10. **Talk to your children on a regular basis about social media,** what they're seeing and who they're communicating with. If your child does not personally know the person, delete the follower. Check your child's apps once a week. Inform children they are not allowed to download or subscribe to any games or apps without parental approval. Know your child's passwords. If allowing a social media account – allow only one (and follow them!).
11. **There is NO privacy on-line!** Talk to your children about the dangers of sharing personal information online, and sending inappropriate or threatening messages/photos. You cannot erase their digital footprint, and there can be consequences to bad decisions. Do social media in a communal location in the house, NOT behind closed doors.

12. **Stay ahead of your kids. Educate yourself about social media sites and apps.** If you allow them to play video games, play with them and know the game content (even Minecraft). Set parental controls on all devices but don't depend on parental controls to manage usage and content. Managing your child's media use is your job!