

Summer Screen Time, Smart Phones, and Social Media

Summer is in full swing! For a lot of kids that means fewer structured activities and a lot more screen time. While extra movies and gaming time can be fun and relaxing, it should be used in moderation with clear rules and limits.

Here are some guidelines to help you decide what boundaries might be helpful for your family:

For Elementary School Age and Younger-

Make sure kids this age are still getting time to:

- play outside every day
- do quiet indoor activities like reading/art
- spend time with family and friends in person

Set reasonable screen time limits.

- These limits should ideally be less than 2 hours per day.
- When their screen time is nearly over, help your kids transition by giving five-minute and one-minute warnings or setting a visual timer.
- Enforce the limits, either by setting parental controls on the device or removing the device when time is up.
- Be consistent with these limits. When kids know what to expect it reduces boundary-pushing and whining in the future.

Engaging in media with your kids by watching together as a family may be better than children watching content alone on tablets. This enables you to:

- monitor what they're watching
- discuss the lessons of movies and shows
- reinforce educational concepts
- bond with your child over their interests

Young kids should never be unsupervised on the internet.

Even apps "designed for children" like YouTube Kids cannot perfectly filter out inappropriate content and they may have different standards than you for what's allowable.

Additional parental controls like linking accounts and only allowing children to view channels you explicitly approve may be helpful, but kids this age should generally only be on the internet when supervised and in a shared family space.

Avoid screens when real-life experiences are happening.

While it may be ok to distract your young child while waiting for food at a restaurant or for an appointment at the doctor's office, when the meal arrives or someone's interacting with them, it's time to put the screens away.

For Tweens and Teens-

During the tween and teenage years, smartphones and social media add another challenging layer to managing screen time.

When to Get a Phone

The "Wait Until 8th" movement suggests not giving children a smartphone prior to the end of 8th grade. This can help preserve other aspects of childhood (like free outdoor play) and delay issues like cyberbullying. You can also help ease social pressures and requests to get a phone by coordinating the timing of phones with other parents in your child's friend group and school district.

Some children may need access to a phone in order to reach a parent for safety or during after school activities.

- This should only apply to kids who are old enough to be left without adult supervision for extended periods of time, generally around age 11 or 12.
- Flip phones or smart watches may be a good stepping stone. This can allow you to assess your child's maturity, their willingness to follow the rules surrounding a phone, and their ability to not lose or break a phone.

Setting Phone Rules

Before giving your child a smart phone, consider laying down a clear agreement around boundaries and consequences.

- This should include your right to know their passwords and to check their messages and apps at any time.
- Set clear time limits for when/where they are allowed to use the phone, when it needs to be handed back to you, and with whom they're allowed to communicate.
- Tweens should only be communicating with people you've specifically approved. As they get older, periodic checks of their communication may be adequate.
- Phones should never be allowed in a child's bedroom overnight. It disrupts sleep and creates too many opportunities for poor choices. Charging all devices in the parents' room overnight is a good house rule.

Have frank and open discussions about internet safety.

- Remind kids that whatever content they allow to be viewable by another person may be linked to them forever.
- Reiterate that they should never send or post photos that they wouldn't want the entire world to see.

- Let them know that cyberbullying will not be tolerated and that if someone treats them poorly or makes them uncomfortable, they should let you know.
- Conversely, if they use the phone to tease, bother, or bully others, the phone should be revoked.
- Remind them to never talk or text while driving (this should result in them losing both car and phone privileges!).
- Apps like Bark can allow you to set time limits, block content, track location, and monitor communication. Be open with your child about your monitoring and the behavior you expect.
- It is normal for your child to give some push back on these rules, but ensuring their safety is one of the most important jobs as a parent.

For Everyone:

Remember to lead by example. Though it may not always seem that way, kids learn what is acceptable behavior by watching you.

Some tips on how to set a good example for kids:

- Be mindful of how much time you spend scrolling. Checking your own usage/time data may be eye-opening.
- Set a rule of no screens during family meals (this includes parents!). Use this time to reconnect with each other.
- Avoid screens 1-2 hours before bed. This may help the body's natural melatonin production and aid in getting restful sleep. Read, talk, listen to music, go for a walk, or play board games as a family instead.
- Have house rules about what you share on social media. This should include not discussing personal information with strangers, being mindful when discussing travel (ie letting others know when you're away from home), asking before sharing photos of other people, having rules regarding politeness of online interactions.

Remember, these guidelines are about what works best for your family and circumstances. Rules can and should be changed when you or kids are sick, during travel, as kids get older and more responsible, and (yes!) even over summer break. Decide what works best for you while keeping your child's safety and development in mind.

Resources:

1. Screen Time Guidelines:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/healthy-digital-media-use-habits-for-babies-toddlers-preschoolers.aspx>

2. Wait Until 8th:

<https://www.waituntil8th.org/>

3. Child's First Phone:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/cell-phones-whats-the-right-age-to-start.aspx>

4. Ready for Phone Quiz:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/Pages/PhoneReadyQuiz.aspx>

5. Example Teen Phone Contract:

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/a-sample-cell-phone-contract-for-parents-and-tweens-3288540>

6. Family Media Plan:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/fmp/Pages/MediaPlan.aspx#/family>

7. Bark App:

https://www.bark.us/how/?utm_source=aw&utm_medium=paid-search&utm_campaign=website-branded-google&utm_content=120345937671&utm_term=e&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw-uK0BhC0ARIsANQtgGOUUnUCXrOlP4p5cJF0AKUelqYhXAIupfyhslfqggU8zLQCowsfPwOoaAgxsEALw_wcB