

MANAGING FAMILY USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media, video games, cell phones, computers, tablets, and TVs are all helpful and challenging for today's parents and children. They provide hours of fun, keep us connected to those far away, and provide us with a window to people, places, and ideas we might otherwise never get to know or explore. However, they can also be problematic and difficult to manage. They require caregivers to set ground rules and expectations for use. Below are some steps you can take to help ensure the reasonable and responsible usage of digital devices by the entire family:

Create a family media plan

- ◇ Agreed-upon expectations can help establish healthy technology boundaries at home – including social media use. A family media plan can promote open family discussion and rules about media use and include topics such as balancing screen/online time, content boundaries, and not disclosing personal information. More info on this www.healthychildren.org/English/fmp/Pages/MediaPlan.aspx.

Create tech-free zones

- ◇ Since electronics can be a potential distraction after bedtime and can interfere with sleep, consider restricting the use of phones, tablets, and computers for at least 1 hour before bedtime and through the night. Have children and parents charge their devices in a common area far from bedrooms. Restrict the use of devices to central areas of the house, as much as possible, so that it is more likely that you can casually monitor what your children are watching and doing on devices.

Balance time with and without devices present

- ◇ Keep family mealtimes and in-person gatherings device-free to build relationships and engage in a two-way conversation. Choose specific family events and daily activities that you will all do together without devices present.

Set clear limits as to how long devices, games, and social media sites can be used

- ◇ Social media has been linked with depression, lack of sleep, isolation, and limited physical



activity for children. Play is very important for early development as is time spent outdoors. Media use can take away from that time. How much screentime should a child have? Two hours or less per day is a safe amount, but each child is different, and it is up to each parent to decide. Generally, babies aged two and under do not need any screentime and preschoolers should only have 1 hour. Check our [Healthy Media Habits resources](#) for more information on managing media use with young children.

Model responsible social media behavior and use of digital devices

- ◇ As children often learn behaviors and habits from what they see around them, try to model the behavior you want to see. Parents can set a good example of what responsible and healthy social media use looks like by limiting their own use and modeling healthy, positive behavior on their social media accounts.

Be cautious about what you share

- ◇ Remember that everything that you post to social media about your family and child, from infancy on, will follow them throughout their life. Ask yourself, "Is this something they want a stranger, a future employer, or a friend during their teenage years seeing?" As soon as children are old enough, ask for their approval before posting anything about them.

Encourage children to foster in-person friendships

- ◇ Help your child develop social skills and nurture their in-person relationships by encouraging unstructured and offline connections with others and making unplugged interactions a daily priority. See American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) [Media and Young Minds | Pediatrics | American Academy of Pediatrics \(aap.org\)](#).

Don't rush to provide children and youth with their own devices

- ◇ Start your child with a basic cell phone—not a smartphone. Commit to Wait Until 8th is a pledge that empowers parents to rally together to delay giving children a smartphone until at least 8th grade. The widespread use of smartphones by children can create unrealistic social pressure and expectations to have one – like their friends do. There are a variety of basic phones and watches that are effective for communication and avoid the many dangers and distractions of smartphones. Smartphone Alternatives — [Wait Until 8th](#).

Teach kids about technology and empower them to be responsible online participants at the appropriate age

- ◇ In age-appropriate ways, discuss with children the benefits and risks of social media, the importance of respecting privacy, and the significance of protecting personal information. Ask about who children are connecting with, their privacy settings, their online experiences, and how they are spending their time online. Empower and encourage them to seek help should they need it. Learn more about the benefits and risks of social media use and get guidance from experts at the American Academy of Pediatric's Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health ([aap.org](#)) and from the American Psychological Association's Health Advisory. American Psychological Association Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence ([apa.org](#)).

Learn to use social media tools

- ◇ Track the amount of time your child spends online, block and help them block unwanted contacts and content, learn about and use available privacy and safety settings, and teach digital media literacy skills to help your child learn to tell the difference between fact and opinion.



Report cyberbullying and online abuse and exploitation

- ◇ Talk to your child about their reporting options, and provide support, without judgment, if they tell or show you that they (a) are being harassed through email, text message, online games, or social media or (b) have been contacted by an adult seeking private images or asking them to perform intimate or sexual acts. Visit CyberTipline ([missingkids.org](#)), Take It Down ([ncmec.org](#)), or contact law enforcement agency to report any instances of online exploitation.

Work with other parents to help establish shared norms and practices and to support programs and policies around healthy social media use

- ◇ Such norms and practices among parents facilitate collective action and can make it easier to set and implement boundaries on social media use for everyone's children.
- ◇ Learn more about the relationship between [social media and youth mental health](#).
- ◇ Consider supporting smartphone bans in your children's schools. The Children and Screens Evidence Council recently voted in favor of banning smartphones from K-12 schools for the entire day because of strong evidence that student learning, social development, and overall well-being improved.
- ◇ Older children and youth are using artificial intelligence more and more both at home and at school. Learn more about ways it can be both helpful and risky with these [tips sheets](#) for parents.