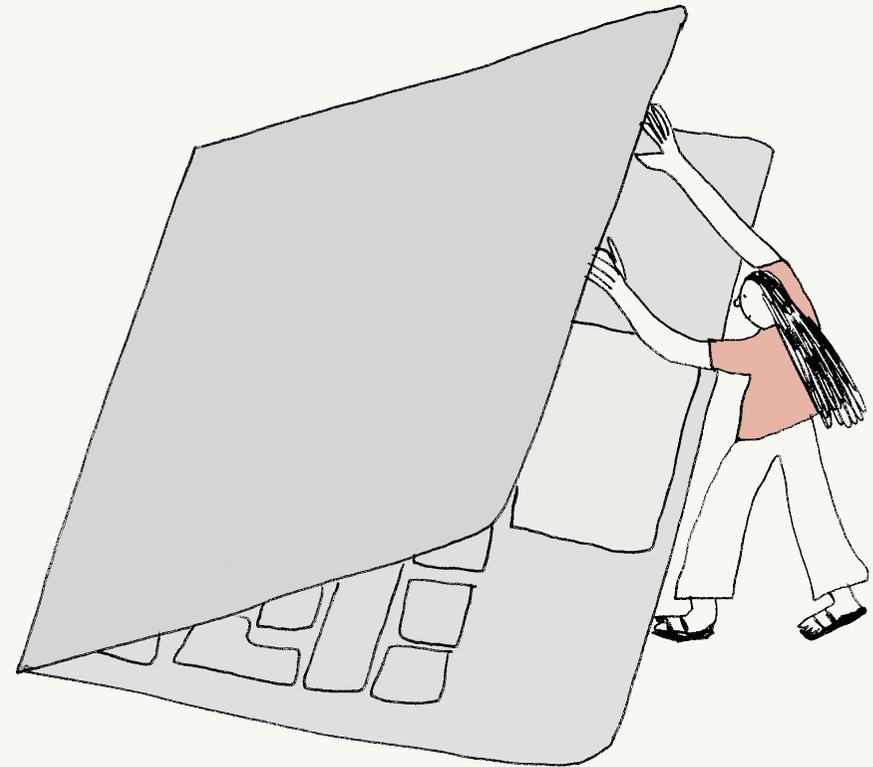


# Too keen for the screen?

10 tips for healthy screen time  
and social media boundaries

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A study at the Boston University School of Medicine by Jenny Radesky and colleagues (2015) found that too much screen time for young people can lead to impaired social emotional literacy, lower empathy and problem solving ability and difficulties in self regulation.

Time on screens and social media are highly engaging and stimulating. This can make everything else — including human contact — feel like a bit of a let down. It's human connection that provides the foundation for healthy wellbeing, social emotional literacy, resilience and academic potential.



1

## Audit your screen time

Ask yourself (and your children if you're feeling brave) if you spend too much time on screens yourself.

If the first thing you do in the morning and last thing you do at night is check your phone, you might benefit from an audit yourself. Many adults know the irresistible pull to check your phone messages or hop on to your social media account for a quick look. It's usually not just limited to when you get up or when you go to bed either. For most people, the pull is felt throughout the day. Your children aren't likely to value spending less time on devices until you lead by example and do the same. If you're struggling, let your children know you're finding it hard too.

2

## Clear & consistent messages

Make sure parents in the home agree about what the device and social media rules are.

Start by discussing your values about the place of devices and social media in your home. If your views differ a lot, you might need to do some research, make a compromise here or there call on an expert to help you find a balance you agree on. Don't rush this stage no matter how desperate you might be for a change. If your family is separated and there are different sets of rules in the other home, be calm and neutral about it. Children are more emotionally hurt by conflict between their parents, than from navigating different rules in different houses.

3

## Balancing act

Support your children to balance how they spend their time.

Balancing what you focus your attention on is important for wellbeing and spending more time on devices than other things can throw your wellbeing out of balance. Device and social media time can be balanced equally with play, movement, sport, socialising, the outdoors, board games, audio books and much more. Family contribution (chores) is another important way to balance life. Even though young people might complain about helping out, when contributing is part of family life, they get the chance to not only build new skills but gain pride and confidence in who they are. Responsibility is important for self esteem.



4

## Talk about making changes before they happen

Involve children by inviting their ideas and opinions, before making any changes.

Young people become easily defensive when they feel decisions about what matters to them are being made without them. Reaching a healthy compromise on screen time is a great opportunity to build your relationship through mutual respect, conversation and understanding. Be empathetic by showing you understand how much they love screen time. Let them know you understand they might not agree with your intention to make new boundaries about screen time. Assure them nothing will change for a week, while you work together to find a balance that is healthy for everyone.

These conversation starters might help you discuss how to set reasonable limits. During these conversations it's important to leave your own judgements and feelings out of the discussion or you'll find they'll switch off.

Do your best not to be black and white and all or nothing about this. Limits can be set gradually. Be willing to be flexible and compromise. While you'll need to set limits, if you're too pushy or authoritarian, they may rebel and refuse to agree, or act like they agree but use the device in secret. Take this process at a reasonable pace, listening to and empathising with their feelings and beliefs.

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## Conversation starters

Tell me what you love about your device.

What do you miss about your device when you're not on it?

What do you like doing as much (or nearly as much) as being on your device?

How can you tell you've had too much screen time?

What might make it hard to keep an agreement about screen time?

Do you know how to tell if someone is safe and friendly to connect with on social media?

What apps and social media accounts are you interested in?

When and where should devices be switched off?



5

## Screen free time

Schedule screen free time daily, where everyone unplugs to eat, talk, exercise or play.

Agree on a time where everyone (including you) puts iPads, phones and gaming devices away in a tray for charging. Human connection won't happen when devices are around to interrupt and distract you.

6

## Tech free zone

Consider making bedrooms a device free zone.

Young brains aren't psychologically, developmentally or emotionally mature enough to sensibly handle the constant buzz, approvals, disapprovals and stimulation devices burden them with. Your limits are vital. As long as there's a device in their bedroom, few young people (or adults) will consistently ignore them. Devices are designed to be great fun and seriously addictive. The bedroom is often the only place you have the opportunity to fully rest and switch off.

7

## Teach manners

Social media and device etiquette.

There are many unwritten rules about using social media. Often children learn by trial and error after a social disaster or two. The essentials include: No texts before or after a certain time, no posting about other people negatively, keep messages positive, supportive and upbeat, only copy other people's texts or photos with their permission, if you're part of a group text, only text about things involving that group, avoid planning social activities with a member, unless everyone is invited and take care with who you 'friend'.

Help them navigate what to do if they get into trouble on social media and group messages. If someone is being unkind to them, tell them to avoid engaging by defending themselves, not to take it personally and to report it to a trusted adult.

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## Watch what they watch

Monitor what they're watching and playing.

Young, developing brains are easily influenced by what they watch and play. Watching and playing more than they're psychologically ready for can be confronting, confusing and even harden them to concepts above their emotional maturity, lowering their empathy, social emotional health and emotional regulation capacity. Age limits on video games, social media apps and movies are there to protect children.

9

## Use an app to monitor time

Consider using a parental monitoring app.

It's frustrating for everyone when screen time becomes a source of conflict and stress between parents and children.

Arguments about getting off devices effect the mood in your household and can lead to painful rifts between parents and children. Once you've reached a healthy agreement with your children about screen time, consider outsourcing the limit setting to one of these apps.

They let you set the time you've agreed on, monitor how much time your children are spending on them and even have automatic cut off settings when they've got the limit. The apps reduce the intensity, emotion and conflict, leaving your agreed limits to be enforced by the APP.

10

## Be firm

Young people addicted to their devices won't be happy about having limits placed on them. Set limits with courage.

As a parent, you won't always be liked by your child. They will want you to say, 'yes' to everything they ask for and they'll make you feel bad when you say, 'no.' Leading your child and teen towards a healthy, responsible and balanced life takes courage. Hear them out as long as they communicate respectfully, but don't enter into arguments or take their comments about your limits personally. Your duty is to protect your child from situations they are not developmentally ready for. It's okay if they don't agree with or understand your limits, as long as you're confident your limits are fair, reasonable and respectfully communicated. You're the adult, trust yourself to lead wisely.

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Positive Minds Australia offers unique solutions for schools, families and health care providers through a broad range of research based programs, counselling and training options to build the social emotional literacy and resilience of young people.

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