

Tips to Manage Screen Time During a Pandemic

Due to COVID-19, screen time in homes around the globe is at an all-time high. For families staying at home, the internet allows kids to attend school and connect with friends and family. With so much more screen time, it may be time to consider new rules. Here some tips to help kids strike a healthy balance of time online and off:

1. Acknowledge the reality.

- Let kids know that screen time is important for school, work, and staying connected.
- While everyone is using the internet a lot more during this time, it doesn't mean constant access is a good thing. It is not healthy to be online all of the time and there are alternatives on how to spend your time.
- Science has proven that kids still need at least eight hours of sleep each night and should engage in healthy physical and social activities.



2. Accept that not all screen time is equal.

- There are three types of online time:
 - Time that is necessary (school or work)
 - Time that connects us to others (video chats and texting with family or friends)
 - Time for relaxation and enjoyment (games, TV, movies).
- The first is dictated by their school, the second is something you should help and encourage for your kids, and the third is something to create rules around together.
- Whenever possible, make screen time positive—whether it's to access educational content or watching movies together as a family.
- Always remind kids and yourself about good digital citizenship. Make sure their online time is spent in safe, kind, and productive ways.



3. Have them earn fun online time.

- Ask your kids to come up with ideas to earn screen time.
- Have them write a list of ideas on pieces of paper to pick from a box.
- The activities they write would ideally be beneficial for them, your family, or others, such as doing a creative or physical activity, reading a book, writing a letter or thank you note, or doing chores to help in the house.

4. Be clear about start and end times.

- Schedules and routines can help everyone feel a bit more “normal”, however, it is up to us to monitor, enforce, and live by those schedules.
- Kids should not feel surprised when their time is up.
- Be sure to let them know when their time is almost over or have them set an alarm so they begin to self-regulate.
- Ask them, when do you think you should be done? By having them come up with the time limit and you supporting it, they are more apt to budget their time appropriately and stick to their own rules.

5. Use parental controls.

- There are technologies that can help you manage screen time. Some of these are in your routers, security software, and even on specific devices, such as the screen time feature available in Apple’s iOS devices.
- This is useful if a child is not old enough or not able to self-regulate their screen time. However, if possible, you should forego technology in favor of kids learning how to manage screen time on their own.
- If the time expires, your kids may need to ask you for more time and explain why. In addition to ensuring they rest their eyes, it can also help encourage constant communication between you and your child.

While the pandemic has forced us to depend on the internet in new ways, it presents us with a great opportunity to learn new skills and habits. These new habits will not only be valuable now, but also serve us and our kids well into the future.

