

Balancing time online

How can I talk about healthy screen habits?



Devices are a part of everyday life for families. Whether it's a tablet, digital TV or a smart phone, it can sometimes be difficult to find a good balance between screens and IRL activities.

As your child grows and their school work increases, it becomes more important to plan screen time with purpose.

Achieving digital balance is good for mental and physical health, so get to know the signs that your child needs a break and talk regularly about how tech can set them up for healthy screen habits.



This guide will help you talk to your child about:

- ✓ Why it's important to plan screen time
- ✓ Ways to improve your lives with tech
- ✓ Recognising the signs of too much time online
- ✓ Using tech to create healthy digital habits
- ✓ Finding more help if you need it



Achieving digital balance means you have time for tech as well as other things in your life.

That might be moments spent with mates and family. It could also be time studying, playing sport or enjoying your hobbies.

Did you know...

50%

You're not alone, as **1 in 2** parents think their child spends too much time online...

29%

... with **near 30%** of parents concerned with balancing internet use with other areas of life.¹



Your child receives a laptop for school but you notice that they're spending most of their time on it watching YouTube videos

This is a dilemma for many parents – as tech becomes a study requirement, it leads to greater misuse of screen time.

The latest research does not put a definitive amount on the number of hours a child should spend in front of a screen.² Rather, the focus needs to shift to educating your child about the benefits and harms of screen use. There is no one-size-fits-all approach and parents should consider their child's individual needs.



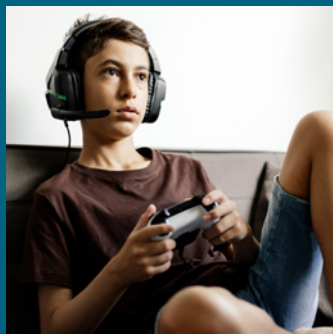
Ask your child to reflect on their own screen use to see if they can identify how they can plan their time better.

Conversation starter

With school and homework often done on screens, it doesn't leave much time for fun stuff like chatting with friends, watching viral videos or playing games. How can you plan your time to enjoy it all?

¹ [Parenting and screen time | eSafety Commissioner](#)

² [Straker-Edwards-Kervin-Burley-Hendry-Cliff-Moving-screen-use-guidelines-Nine-reasons-why-screen-use-guidelines-should-be-separated-2023-01.pdf \(digitalchild.org.au\)](#)



Since your child started playing a new video game, they have missed family dinners and you've noticed uncharacteristic mood swings

Too much screen time can affect your child physically, mentally and emotionally.

It's a good idea to keep an eye out for signs that your child needs a break from their screens and have a conversation with them about how they can identify the signs within themselves.

What are some signs³ of too much screen time?



Physical

- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Sore eyes
- Poor personal hygiene

Conversation starter

How long does it take until you feel sore eyes or neck from looking at your screen? What could you do when that happens?



Mental

- Not interested in social or physical activity
- Poor concentration on school tasks
- Withdrawn from friends and family
- Obsession with apps or games

Conversation starter

Can you tell me about a time you were playing your favourite online game and you missed out on completing schoolwork or seeing friends? Why did you keep playing the game?



Emotional

- Irritable when away from online activity
- Anxious when interacting with people in real life
- Anger when asked to take a break
- Sad when scrolling particular social media accounts

Conversation starter

How has an online game or social media account changed the way you feel about yourself? How has it changed how you feel about other people around you?

³ Screen time | How much is too much? | eSafety Commissioner



Your child has an assignment due at the end of the week, but you see them constantly scrolling through social media when they're supposed to be completing their study tasks

Many apps and games are designed to catch and hold our attention.

Designers use colours, sounds and techniques like infinite scroll to keep us hooked.⁴

This can make it really hard for your child to focus on the tasks at hand, even when they want to.



Help your child understand that tech has the power to do so much more than scrolling and swiping. Immediate access to the internet is an incredible study resource and there are apps that can help your child focus while they're learning.

Conversation starter

How does tech help with your schoolwork?
How does it hurt your schoolwork?
Let's research productivity apps to help you meet your study goals.

Handy hint

Have you heard about the Pomodoro Technique? It's a way to focus your work or study in 25-minute blocks with 5-minute breaks. Search your device's app store for this time management tool.

⁴[The Infinite Scroll: Why It's So Addictive and How to Break Free - Freedom Matters](#)



What else can they do to fight distraction?

- ✓ Manage notifications across different apps
- ✓ Flick on airplane mode
- ✓ Switch the colour palette to greyscale
- ✓ Ask friends not to be in contact during study or sleep times



Paying attention to screen time usage and setting time limits on specific apps can help remind your child of how much time they are spending on distracting apps or games and help them stay focused.

Conversation starter

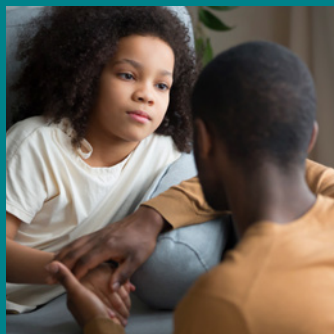
Do you know how much time you spend on your favourite games or apps?

Let's take a look at your screen time breakdown together in your device's settings to understand which app is distracting you and set some limits.

Handy hint

Add a screen time widget to your child's home screen and show them how to set daily usage limit.





Your child seems quiet and withdrawn, and when prompted, tells you they are stressed by their school work, find it hard to connect with friends and struggle to relax in their down time

The link between maintaining positive mental health and wellbeing and doing well at school is becoming more evident.⁵ One of the best things about technology is how it can support our wellbeing.



Explore ways that you can help your child utilise apps to create wellbeing and digital balance.

Conversation starter

Have you ever tried a health or wellbeing app? Some people use a mindfulness app to help relax. What areas in your life could use some digital help? Let's see if there is an app for it.

Together with your child, try searching the app store to find an app that helps them:



Move

Step counters, workout or dance programs



Relax

Breath, meditation or yoga courses



Study

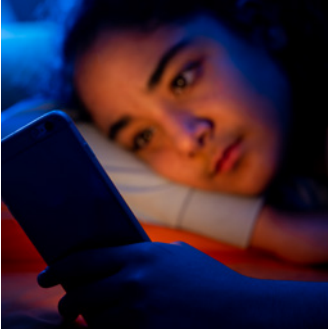
Note taking, flash card or time management apps



Organise

Calendars, task reminders or checklists

⁵ [Understanding the middle years \(studentwellbeinghub.edu.au\)](http://Understanding the middle years (studentwellbeinghub.edu.au))



Your child complains that they are having trouble sleeping and you notice they are always on their devices right before bed

Studies have shown bright screen light affects the body's natural ability to fall asleep.

A good night's sleep is essential to help recharge the energy it takes to develop a young person's body. Regularly using a device for long hours before bed can delay the body clock by 1.5 hours, which can result in not enough sleep.⁶



Check in with your child about their ability to fall asleep, stay asleep and work on strategies together to help build a better bedtime routine.

Conversation starter

What are the signs that you haven't had enough sleep? Can you name some things that affect your ability to fall asleep? What are some actions you can take to help you get a full night's sleep?

Handy hint

The good news is our devices are equipped with the latest wellbeing tools to help get a better night's sleep. Guide your child through:

- ✓ Setting up sleep schedules
- ✓ Turning on a blue light filter in the evening
- ✓ Setting time limits for apps that are most distracting before bedtime
- ✓ Pause connectivity on mobile devices and Wi-Fi⁷

⁶Technology & Sleep (sleephealthfoundation.org.au)

⁷Available to eligible Optus customers with an eligible mobile, home internet and/or nbn service. T&Cs apply.

What to do if your child needs more help



If you and your family need more support to create healthy digital balance, you can search:

- [eSafety Commissioner](#) for more resources



If your child needs to talk to someone about their feelings or worries, they can contact:

- [Kids Helpline](#) on 1800 55 1800 for free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling services
- [13YARN](#) on 13 92 76 for a free, private and confidential talk 24/7 with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter

About Optus Digital Thumbprint

Optus Digital Thumbprint supports digital safety and wellbeing for young people and families. Find out more at www.digitalthumbprint.com.au

