

What Parents Can Do About TECHNOLOGY ADDICTION AT HOME

PARENTING GUIDELINES: **RULES** OF **EVERY** AGE

What can parents do? Children need different rules at different ages of development. Here are some 3-6-9-12 Rules for the home which parents may want to use to determine how much technology their child is exposed to.



Birth-3 years Rules: Never/Nowhere

No technology, this includes smartphones, computers, and televisions. Any screen time impairs social communication, development, and a child's attachment to the parent or other family members. If they are completely disconnected from technology, they have time to develop relationships with others and can develop other needed sensory-motor skills playing with physical toys, reading skills, and relationships with other children.

3-6 years Rules: One Hour a Day

At this age, children can be introduced to technology under careful parental supervision. Parents too often may give a child a tablet or smartphone as a sitter or a reward for good behavior. This is a crucial time in childhood development for them to learn pro-social behavior and social behavior. Keep them involved in activities outside of the computer and avoid multiplatform portable devices (e.g., phones, iPads, laptops). Watch their use in public areas of the home and block video games and questionable sites.

Appropriate activities now are:

1. Uses an eReader for storytime
2. Sorting shapes and finding hidden objects on mobile apps
3. Access to electronic toys that educate and teach numbers, letters, and vowel sounds
4. Make sure they still physically play, read books, and engage other children



6-9 years Rules: Supervised Use

Children need to balance technology with social and physical behavior. Now that children have passed the physical milestones of mastery of running and kicking, and bending over without falling, screen use may include games that the entire family can play on the Wii or Xbox 360. It is important this screen time is a family bonding experience. Some of the best all-ages games on the Wii are Just Dance Kids and Epic Mickey. If you are not sure about a game's content, use the Entertainment Soft-

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ware Rating Board app (it is free) to judge its appropriateness. Still control and avoid multiplatform portable devices as these are hard to monitor. If used, they can be allotted 2 hours of screen time per day under close parental supervision.

Appropriate activities now are:

1. Uses the Internet under supervision (create tech-free time to talk each day!)
2. Plays active video games with the family
3. Take time to create a new definition of “screen time”
4. Keep children active in school clubs, sports, peers, and outside activities



9-12 Years Rules: Responsible Use

Still have the rule of no more than 2 hours of screen time a day, including family videogame time. Do not allow access to tech devices in private areas of the home, and no access to online gaming (especially any role-playing games).

At this age, children need to be mentally and physically stimulated through reading, taking nature walks, riding bikes, getting involved in school and sport activities, making friends at school, and spending time with family. Try to establish family time with no technology (e.g., no screens at dinner or in the car). If rules are broken, confiscate all screen devices for 24 hours (or longer) and lock all technology up at night.

Appropriate activities now are:

1. Uses the Internet under supervision (create tech-free time to talk each day.)
2. Independence with technology, social media with strict time limitations and rules for use
3. Monitor computer homework and confiscate all tech when screen time rules are broken
4. Make sure children complete chores and stay involved with school activities and friends

12-18 years Rules: Independence

This is time when most of the arguments and disobedience happen. Children can emotionally implode when parents put computer/Internet rules on them. By now, your child probably has his or her own smartphone. They see many of their friends with unlimited computer access.

They are sick of the rules. They are also young and cannot absorb the meaning of parental rules.

As children enter the teenage years, they want independence. Rules of the house usually change as they can stay out later or meet friends or by age 16, they start to drive. These are all signs of independence, and screen use is no different. At this age, teenagers desire their own social media accounts and demand privacy and unsupervised online time.

“Digital diet” and “digital nutrition” are important at this age. If you grant unrestricted use, have your child maintain a digital log. They can provide you with updates on their time online. A digital log helps a teenager also keep track of their own media use. Too much time online, like food, can result in harmful habits. A digital log helps you track a child’s balanced and healthy digital diet without hovering over their daily online use.

Regarding digital nutrition, this is a time to help children make better choices about their activities online. Do they play videogames all day or are they doing homework? Are they using social media or are they researching a paper for school? Like food addiction, online use is about making healthy choices. Nutrition means that as an independent teenager the technology is used responsibly.

Once you have rules for responsible technology use, decide on discipline for violations in advance, whether you ban your child from driving for a week or a month, whether you ground them, cut back on their allowance or Internet use – whatever – plan it in advance.

Make sure your child has daily chores around the house (e.g., doing the dishes, cutting the lawn, shoveling snow, or taking out garbage). Keep them structured. At 16, urge them to get a job. If they are working, then they don’t have time to play or use all their digital devices. This also helps them develop a work ethic. Working also helps teenagers maintain structure in their day to avoid boredom and idle time that contributes to screen overuse and addiction and they can now afford their own digital devices.

Appropriate activities now are:

1. Your child has independence with technology but make sure your child turns in a weekly digital log to improve engagement with technology and the family
2. Review what is meant by digital diet and digital nutrition and decide on consequences for violations of rules and time limits
3. Know your child’s online friends, invite them to dinner and talk about how they are
4. Make sure they complete chores and stay involved with school activities and friends
5. When old enough, have children work to improve their time structure, personal financial management, and develop a good work ethic.

