

Healthy Children



April 2021 Parent Newsletter



Online and connected: How to help your child stay well in our virtual world

These days, it might seem like your kids are always on a screen—a smart phone, tablet, TV, computer, video game, or other tech device. Life during the COVID-19 pandemic has gone virtual, and kids often use screens to take part in activities they used to do in person: play dates, family visits, sport classes, music lessons, and more.

In these unusual times, try to focus on what your kids are doing on their screens, instead of dwelling on how much time they're putting in. Be there to help them navigate their online experiences. Here's what you can do:

Encourage meaningful screen use.

Prioritize online experiences that are engaging and purposeful over those that are passive or unsocial.

- Use tech devices to have meaningful interactions with others. Show your kids how to video call or message a friend or family member. Help them find virtual games they can play safely with friends or trusted, caring adults.
- Steer your kids toward screen-based activities that suit their interests and can help them learn. Watch shows together about nature, history, or space.

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Look for “how to videos” to learn new recipes, dances, magic tricks, crafts, or science experiments.

- Try virtual ways of getting active, like online dance or fitness classes, sport training, or yoga. Help your child use apps to set physical activity goals and track their progress.

Make offline time a priority. Try not to let screens interfere with healthy offline activities in your home.

- Go screen-free for most meals and snacks. Research shows that your family will make more nutritious food choices and have better conversations when there are no devices at the table.
- Help your children unplug from screens at least an hour before bedtime. This will give them time to unwind and will make it easier to fall asleep and wake up on time. Do your best to keep tech devices out of bedrooms—they can disrupt a good sleep.
- Aim for a few days each week with less time in front of a screen. Pull out the puzzles, board games, and craft supplies, or head outside for a spring walk or bike ride.

Consider family agreements. Make a plan, pledge, or agreement to outline what healthy screen use looks like for your family. You’ll find a variety of [templates](#) and [samples](#) online—the key is to work together to land on something that’s in line with your family values, and flexible enough for each person in your home. For younger kids, set clear boundaries, and consider limits on time and content. For older children, be open to negotiation. Gradually let them take responsibility for shaping and respecting the rules.

Get involved. Do your research about the programs, apps, and social networks your kids are using. Make sure you know their login information and passwords for all devices and accounts. Explore [parental controls](#) and privacy settings to decide what’s right for your family.

Consider joining in when your kids are using screens—play a video game or try out an app together. You might find that this challenges your assumptions and helps to create space for conversation.

Model healthy screen use. Turn off your devices when your kids are around, especially if they’re interacting with you. Ask yourself if your texts, emails, and social media accounts can wait. Give your kids your full attention—they’ll appreciate you for it, and you’ll set a great example.

Monitor for signs of a problem. Be honest about how your kids are doing—are screens making them happy, or are they becoming moody and irritable? Are they taking part in healthy offline activities, like reading, hobbies, and outdoor activities? Are they sleeping well? If you have concerns, talk to a health care professional or call 811 to speak to a Registered Nurse.

Remember, there’s no playbook for parenting in a pandemic. Your child might spend some days looking at screens more than you’d like. Do your best to keep an open mind. With your support, kids can learn to balance life online and off.

For more great advice, go to:
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