

Finding balance: becoming a screen smart family



Screens and devices are now firmly part of our world. We all use them to work, play, learn and socialise – and so do our children. Your child knows what you expect from them in your home and when in public, and it is important that expectations around screen use are included in these rules.

Establishing a healthy approach to technology

While there are recommended guidelines for daily screen time, it can be more helpful to focus on the type of screen use, especially as these guidelines distinguish between sedentary screen time and educational activities. Comparing it to food, we understand that some foods are more nutritious than others, even though they all provide energy. Similarly, moderation is key.

Instead of imposing complete bans on screen time, monitoring screen time can help strike a balance. Of course, certain activities and content should not be accessible to children, but apart from those, setting rules enables your family to find a harmonious relationship with technology.

Signs that the balance isn't right

If you notice any of the following behaviours in your child, it may indicate that the balance between screen time and other activities needs adjusting:

- Feeling tired during the day due to late-night device use.

- Becoming agitated or angry when asked to switch off their device.
- Sneaking their devices to avoid detection.
- Neglecting other toys or play activities.
- Lacking physical exercise due to excessive screen time.
- Discussing or engaging in games that involve mature concepts or characters beyond their age appropriateness.

Taking action: become a Screen Smart family

Creating a Screen Smart Plan is crucial for maintaining a healthy balance, and involving the whole family in its development increases the likelihood of success.

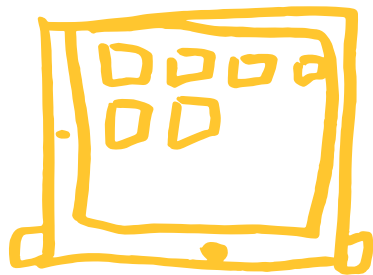
Consider the following components for each family member:

- Define where screens and devices can and can't be used within the household. Lounge rooms can be designated as suitable areas, while bedrooms may be off-limits.
- Establish a process for seeking permission before accessing new games or shows. Ensure your child understands why age restrictions are in place and research these together.
- Determine appropriate time limits for each tech activity and establish priorities such as completing homework or household chores before screen time.
- Identify shared activities that the family can

enjoy together to foster a healthy relationship with screens and model balanced screen use.

- Don't hesitate to introduce incentives to encourage adherence to the rules, particularly in the early stages of implementing the agreement. Offering enjoyable alternative activities during breaks from screens can make the transition more palatable.

Importantly, remember that you are a member of the family too! While your approach to being screen smart may differ from your child's, it's essential to demonstrate your commitment to the agreed-upon rules. By modelling the desired behaviour, you convey the seriousness of maintaining a balanced approach to screen time.



Key takeaways:

1. Set clear boundaries: Establish rules and guidelines for screen use within the family, including designated areas for tech usage and restrictions on screen time in certain spaces like bedrooms.
2. Prioritise communication: Engage in open and honest discussions with your child about the purpose and importance of age restrictions for accessing new games or shows.
3. Strike a balance: Encourage a healthy balance between screen time and other activities by defining appropriate time limits for tech use and ensuring that tasks such as homework and chores are completed before engaging with screens.
4. Foster shared experiences: Identify activities that the whole family can enjoy together, both involving screens and promoting offline interactions, to model a balanced and positive relationship with technology.
5. Lead by example: As a parent or caregiver, it's crucial to adhere to the established Screen Smart Plan and demonstrate responsible screen use – modelling the desired behaviour reinforces the importance of maintaining a balanced approach to screen time for everyone in the family.

Telstra tech talk

Technology platforms like Microsoft, Apple, and Google which design the operating systems that run iPhone, iPads, and most other phones have built-in family controls that allow parents to set screen time limits and content restrictions on platforms like YouTube. Game platforms like Xbox also offer similar family controls. They will also generate screen time reports showing the games and apps most used and when.

