

# LET'S TALK ABOUT SCREEN TIME

A parent's guide to the  
screen time conversation

*By Truce  
Family*



# CHANGE IS HARD

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Making changes to your family's screen time habits is a challenging transition, especially for the kids. When screens are removed or limited, you are effectively cutting off a dopamine source, social lifeline, and entertainment hub all at once.

It's challenging, but the benefits heavily outweigh the discomfort. We do this in the name of kids' wellbeing. Introducing screen time limits (monitoring) works best when it's framed as a family lifestyle change rather than a punishment for bad behavior.

This guide covers what to expect, how to prepare, and how to start the conversation. It's meant to help you have a proactive conversation about screen time and have a stronger connection as a family.

Follow this guide in a way that works best for you and your family.





# 1. THE PRE-GAME: WHAT PARENTS NEED TO DECIDE FIRST

Before you make this change, you and your co-parent/partner (if applicable) need to have total clarity on your expectations.

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## Determine the "Why"

Implementing screen time changes work best when the "why" is a valid reason anchored in your child's well-being.

- **Sleep hygiene:** "Screens stop melatonin production."
  - **Mental health:** "We want to reduce anxiety and doom-scrolling."
  - **Connection:** "We miss hanging out with you without distractions."
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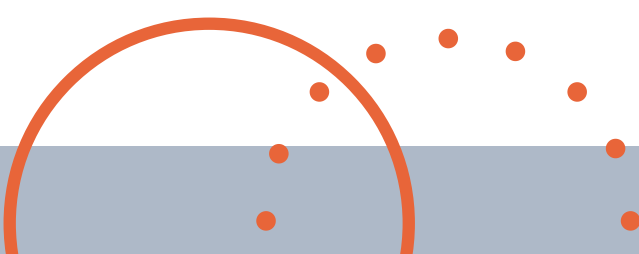
## Align on the "Non-Negotiables"

Decide which limits are set in stone and which are flexible. Common structures include:

- **The Blackout Times:** No screens during homework time, at the dinner table, or after 9:00 PM.
  - **The "Work First" Rule:** No entertainment screens until homework/chores are marked complete.
  - **The Hard Cap:** A specific time limit (e.g., 2 hours of gaming per day).
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## Audit Yourself

Are you willing to follow similar rules? If you ban phones at dinner but check your work email between bites, the change will fail. Be ready to model the behavior you are asking for.





## 2. THE REALITY CHECK: WHAT TO EXPECT

You are likely about to intervene in your child's primary social outlet. Anticipating these reactions will help you stay calm and not take it personally.

### **The "Trust" Argument:**

"You don't trust me! I'm not a baby!"

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Reality: This change isn't about trust; it's about health and habit formation.

### **The FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) Panic**

"Everyone else is on TikTok. I'll be the only one who doesn't know what happened."

Reality: This is a genuine fear for them. Acknowledge it, but hold the boundary.

### **The Bargaining**

"I promise I'll get better grades/do more chores!"

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Reality: This may be a good middle ground if it works for your family, but it may be hard to navigate.

### **The Withdrawal**

"Well what am I supposed to do then?"

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Reality: Expect irritability, boredom, or silence at first. Offer alternative activities, like reading or caring for a pet.

# 3. STRATEGIES FOR A PEACEFUL CONVERSATION



Screen time monitoring is inevitably an emotional topic. Here's how to bring up the conversation with the most peace as possible.

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## **Validate the Feeling, Hold the Boundary**

"I know it feels unfair that your friends don't have this rule, and I know you're worried about missing out. I hear you. However, our job is to make sure you get enough sleep to function, so the 9:00 PM rule stands."

## **Focus on the "Addiction," Not the "Addict"**

Frame the technology as the problem (apps are designed to keep us hooked), rather than blaming the child for having no self-control.

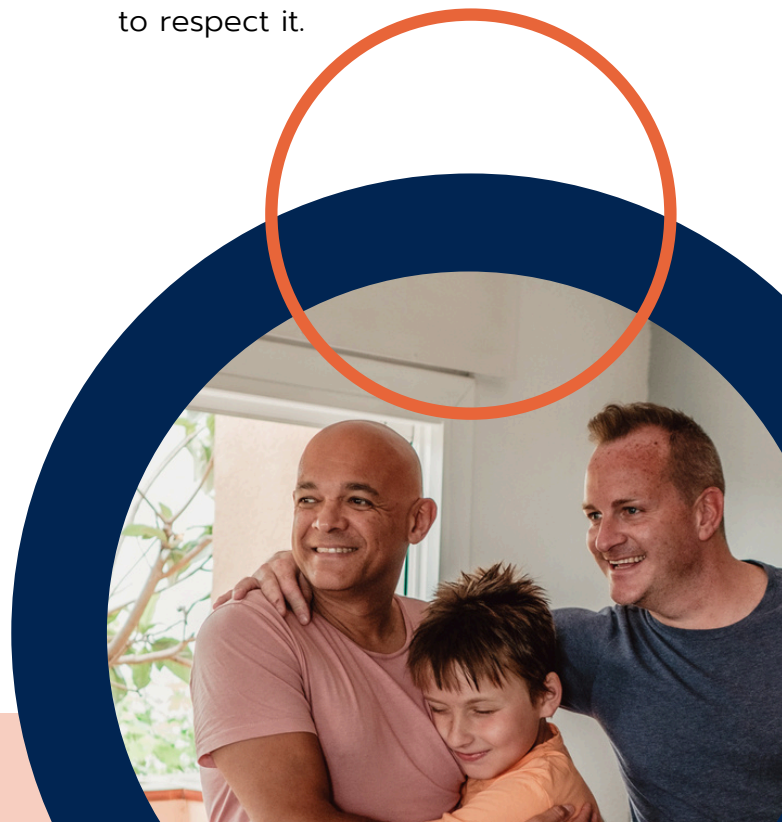
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## **Timing is Everything**

Don't start this talk while they are currently on a device or right after a fight. Choose a neutral time, like a car ride or a weekend breakfast.

## **Collaborate, Don't Dictate**

Present the problem ("We are all too distracted") and ask for their input on the solution. If they help set the limit, they are more likely to respect it.





## 4. HOW TO INTRODUCE THE CONVERSATION

Here are four different approaches/scripts depending on your parenting style and your child's personality.

### **The "Health & Science" Approach**

*Best for: Logical kids or teens who resent authority.*

"I've been reading a lot about how apps are designed to steal our attention and ruin our sleep, and I've noticed it affecting all of us—including me. We are going to make some changes to the router/settings to protect our sleep and focus. I want to talk to you about what a fair schedule looks like before we set it up."

### **The "Observation" Approach**

*Best for: When grades or mood have recently slipped.*

"I've noticed lately that you seem really tired in the mornings and we haven't been talking as much at dinner. I think the phones are getting in the way. We're going to hit the reset button. Starting Monday, we're going to try 'phone-free dinners' and 'charging in the kitchen overnight.' What do you think is a fair consequence if one of us breaks that rule?"

### **The "Experiment" Approach**

*Best for: Reducing resistance by making it temporary initially.*

"I feel like we are all glued to screens lately. I want to try a family experiment for just one week. We are going to limit entertainment apps to two hours a day and see if we feel less stressed or have more time for other stuff. After the week is up, let's review how it went. Are you game to try this with me?"

### **The "Tech-Guardrails" Approach**

*Best for: Setting hard limits on homework/bedtime.*

"You've got a heavy workload this year. To help you focus, we're going to set up 'Downtime' on your phone during study hours and sleep hours. This way, you don't have to use willpower to ignore notifications—the phone will just stay quiet for you. Let's look at your schedule and decide what hours you need to be totally focused."

# SUMMARY CHECK LIST

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Making changes to your family's screen time habits is a challenging transition, especially for the kids. When screens are removed or limited, you are effectively cutting off a dopamine source, social lifeline, and entertainment hub all at once.

- **United Front:** Are you and your co-parent in agreement?
- **Clear Rules:** Do you know exactly what times/apps are being limited?
- **Empathy:** Are you prepared to listen to their frustration without caving?
- **Modeling:** Are you ready to put your own phone away?





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