**How to Limit your Teen’s Screen Time?**

**Source: Ami Morin, LCSW & Carly Snyder, MD**

Knowing that parents can make a difference for their child by limiting screen use, what can you do? What strategies have helped other parents implement and enforce these rules?

Every child is different, and one strategy may work better for one child than another. That said, we hope that at least a few of these 10 techniques will help you set healthy limits for your own child.

**Make Screen Time a Privilege**

One of the ways in which screen time has changed dramatically in recent years is that it's often felt to be more of a right than a privilege. If you grew up watching the four channels available, you may have felt fortunate to watch a cartoon on Saturday morning. The combination of having just about anything available on a screen 24/7 places more pressure on parents to say when a child can and cannot have screen time.

Make it clear that screen time is a privilege that needs to be earned. At first, this may be difficult. But the lessons from learning to delay the gratification of screen time and control her impulses will stay with your child for a long time.

Also, make it clear that the privilege of screen time can be taken away at any time. Teach your teen to do homework and chores first, before he turns on the TV or plays on the computer.

**Role Model Healthy Habits**

Telling your teen to shut off his electronics while you’re sitting in front of the TV isn’t likely to be effective. Teens will learn more from what you do than what you say. Be a good role model by limiting your own screen time. Let your child see you make the choice between looking something up on Google and checking the score of a game. Show her how you have learned treat media as a privilege.

**Discourage Multitasking**

Most teens think they’re pretty good at multitasking. They try to text message while doing their homework or use social media while talking on the phone. If your child has a phone, you're probably all too familiar with their justifications for doing so. Discourage your teen from doing two things at once and discuss how multitasking actually interferes with productivity.

**Encourage Physical Activity**

Encourage your teen to get some exercise. Going for a walk, playing a game of catch, or even doing some yard work can ensure your teen will get the physical activity she needs. Think of activities you can enjoy as a family so it seems less like exercising.

Does your family like hiking? Consider geo caching, an activity (often on hiking trails) in which families hide or hunt for objects using GPS. (A geo cache is a container which may contain toys and other treasures). Some families enjoy tennis. Others enjoy going to the local rock climbing gym. Physical activities not only enforce time away from screens but are beneficial for your child physically and socially as well.

**Educate Your Teen**

Have frequent conversations about various aspects of media. Discuss how advertisements often try to convince young people that certain products will make them more attractive or more popular. Discuss the dangers of too much violence exposure and help them learn how to be an informed viewer.

**Electronics Free Mealtime**

Shut off your TV during mealtimes and don’t allow text messaging or web surfing while you’re eating. Instead, use the opportunity to talk about your day. You may be hearing more and more about how family dinners can make kid's lives better. Don't let screens cheat your family out of this priceless time.

**Screen-Free Days**

Every once in a while it can be helpful to have a screen-free day. You might even consider a longer digital detox—like a week-long vacation from electronics twice a year. It’s a great way to ensure that everyone still has plenty of activities that don’t involve electronics.

**Schedule Family Activities**

Involve everyone in activities that don’t involve electronics. Whether you play a board game or go for a family hike, make it clear that during your time together there won’t be any electronic use.

**Hold Family Meetings**

Schedule a family meeting to discuss screen time use. Allow your teen to give input about the screen time rules. Address problems and problem-solving together. Make it clear that you want everyone in the family to develop a healthy relationship with electronics. If you've never had a family meeting, there are good resources available on how to hold successful family meetings, such as making sure every family member has the opportunity to share his thoughts.

**Communicate the importance of online safety**

Most kids will be aware of ‘stranger danger’ but it’s crucial they understand the potential impact and long-term consequences of being online. Ensure children (especially tweens and teens) apply the same caution around ‘stranger danger’ across online platforms, as child predators often use false personas to lure and exploit children.

Make sure they understand that once content is digitally shared, there’s no way of deleting or removing it completely. This includes sharing of any texts, images and video content – even via the ‘stories’ function on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat that are designed to “disappear” after 24 hours.

Be accepting and supportive – social media isn’t always bad

The use of the internet and social media are now typical aspects of a child’s development. Social media can be a great channel for children to explore and discover more about themselves, as well as socially connect with people beyond their immediate circle.

Be supportive of your child’s explorations and appreciate that these are the tools of the modern world. Accept that they’ll make mistakes, let them learn from them and be there when they need you. Warn them about the potential for problematic online behaviours such as bullying, and let them know that if they have any questions or concerns, your door is always open.