Google

Digital Wellbeing Family Guide

To help you tackle the tough questions, we've created a guide to spark productive conversations and identify healthy habits that work for your whole family.
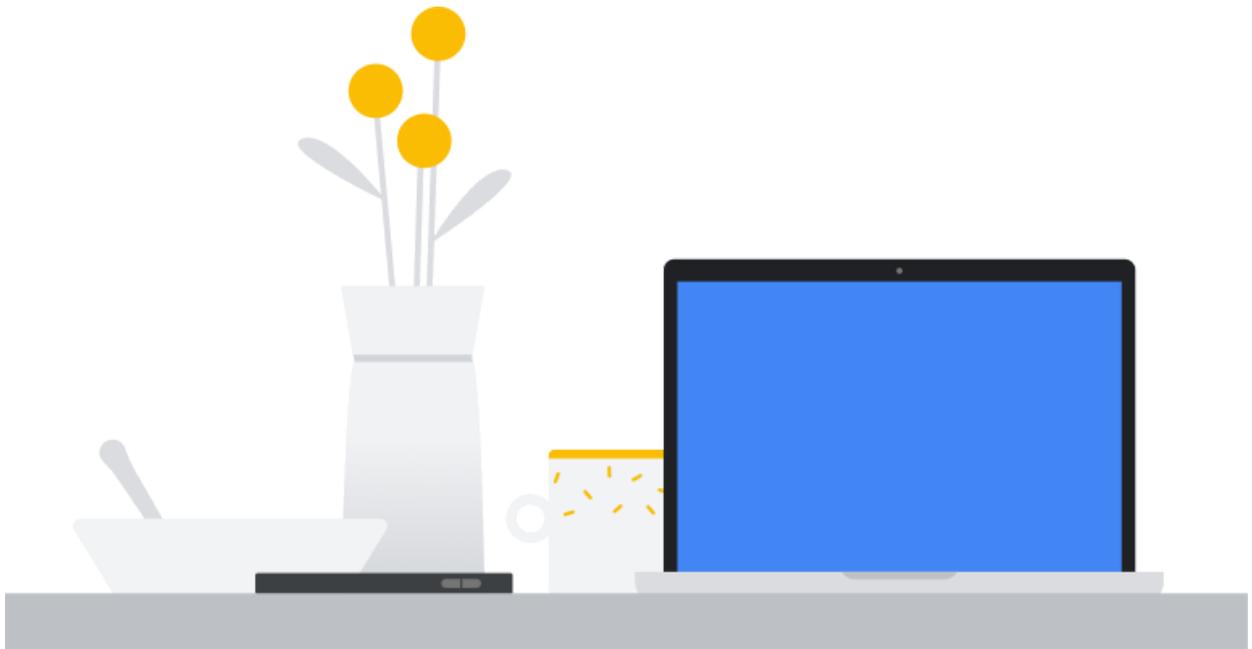
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Decide when and how to use devices

The following guide can help your family have more thoughtful conversations about technology and identify moments to disconnect, prioritizing quality time together.

01 Does technology ever prevent you from being present?

To begin, talk about how devices can sometimes cause people to miss out on things that matter to them. Touch on times when you weren't fully "there" for a particular moment because you were on your phone, and ask your kids if they've observed others (like friends or family) not being fully present with the people around them.

Have your kids also experienced a time when they were distracted from an important moment because of technology? How did they feel about it afterward? Were they on a particular app or game when it happened, and have they noticed a pattern in their own activity?

02 Find times and places to focus.

What are the times and places your family feels it's important to be focused? Is it during homework? While spending time with one another? Talk about how to approach technology during these times when you want to keep your attention on a task.

Reflect on what balance feels like, not only for your kids, but for the whole family. Then look to apply that concept to the times and places throughout their day.

03 Reflect on ways to move forward.

Based on what you've discussed so far, what changes would create more balance for your family? Are any current boundaries working or not working? Are there moments in the day—like meal times—when the family would like to unplug altogether?

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Work together.
Involve your kids to help them feel a part of the decision-making process.

Reflect on your own use.
Understanding your habits is the first step to making changes that can model positive behaviors.

Give them the tools.
Focus on helping your kids self-regulate so they learn how to make good decisions on their own.

"Kids don't have the big-picture perspective that parents have, so we need to help them cultivate their own sense of self-regulation."

Jason Brand, LCSW

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Family-time box

Along with your kids, pick a room and times you've all decided are going to be "device free." Then create a device storage box and have some fun decorating it! As you're making the box, talk about where it will go, when it will be used, and why.

Device-free rooms

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Device-free times

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Find positive content

Every family has a different definition of what is "healthy" or positive. The guide below is designed to help you apply this concept to your family's tech habits. Together you will determine a mix of content and activities that feels right for your family.

01 # Explore positive online activities.

Start by asking your kids what they think are positive ways to spend time online (and why). To get them going, you can ask them about websites, apps, or videos that have taught them something or helped them feel motivated, inspired, or connected.

02 # What makes content "unhealthy?"

Next, ask them what they consider to be less positive activities online (and why). This is a great time to talk about certain platforms, apps, and websites, but also specific things they do on them. You may want to reflect on video content: In their opinion, what kinds of videos do they feel are good uses of time and what kinds aren't?

03 # Work together to create balance.

Finally, ask your kids why they think it's important to find a balance in their digital activity. If they think they are spending a lot of time with content that isn't right for them, brainstorm ideas for types of content they can feel good about and help them prioritize it.

It's quantity and quality.

Using digital devices in a balanced way is as much about how long you spend with screens as it is about how that time is spent.

Start with yourself.

You can be a powerful force for good in helping your kids create healthy habits. Consider changes you might want to make to your own behavior to model the habits you want to see in your kids.

Be flexible.

Placing inflexible time limits with devices can become harder as your kids get older. Try to help them become aware of their tendencies so they can start making smart decisions for themselves.

"Rather than simply talking about 'screen time', discuss in a more nuanced way the activities on the device—whether they are developmentally appropriate, mood enhancing, and educational."

Nick Allen, PhD

Use technology to learn something new

As a family, challenge yourselves every day for a week to use technology to learn something new that you can share. Maybe it's a fact about the planet, some rare trivia on a movie you all like, or a historical nugget about your town. At the end of the week, talk about the things you learned and what everyone thought was most interesting or surprising.

Our weekly new things!

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Determine when your kids are ready for a device

Deciding the appropriate time to hand your kids a device of their own can be tough to navigate. The following guide can help you talk about the responsibilities that come with having a device and what it means to be ready.

01 Smartphones 101

Start by asking your kids why they think phones are important. Try to go beyond answers like "because everyone has one" or "it's just the way the world is now." The goal is for you to learn their perspective on how phones should be used.

02 The role of smartphones in our day-to-day lives.

Discuss with your kids how they would use their phone if and when they receive one. Are all of those uses important? Are there ways to do those things without a phone? Would a phone help solve real challenges your kids are experiencing?

03 Describe expectations and responsibilities.

Ask your kids to reflect on their own readiness and share your expectations for what they need to do in order to have their own phone. Share with your kids the realistic cost of a new phone, and discuss how you would handle it being lost or broken. You might also want to explain how a data plan and app purchases work, so they understand that even digital actions have real-life implications.

04 Are they ready?

Finally, have your kids brainstorm ways they can demonstrate that they are ready for their own phone. For example, how will they keep track of their own screen time? Or, how will they be responsible for managing the app purchases on their device? For more on this topic, view the conversation guide topics "Deciding when and how to use your devices" and "Finding healthy content."

Every kid is unique.

There is no magic age when all kids are ready for devices of their own. The decision should be based on their maturity level and ability to handle the responsibility that comes with owning one.

Talk about expectations.

Even if your kids aren't ready for a device, it's valuable to talk with them about what your expectations are for when the time is right. This will help them understand the responsibility that comes with owning a device.

## Get help with online security and safety.

For information on teaching your kids about online security (like passwords) and safety (like who it's OK to talk to on their device), visit the Be Internet Awesome website and our Safety Center.

"Instead of focusing so much on the technology, talk to kids about what their motivations are behind the use of that technology and what they are trying to achieve."

Nick Allen, PhD

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Create a presentation

If you've had the above conversation with your kids, and they're convinced they're ready for a device, ask them to explain their rationale. This could simply take the form of a letter or report, or even a presentation, similar to what they create for school. Suggest they include specific examples of how they would handle situations like seeing something that makes them upset or uncomfortable, using their device at school, or other concerns you may have. Afterward, have an open and honest discussion about the ways you feel they are or aren't ready for a device of their own.
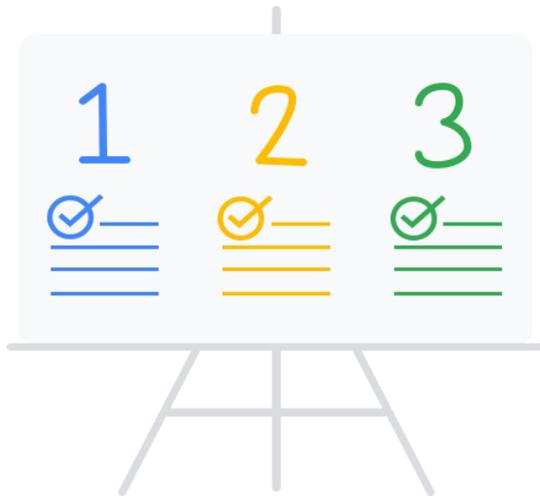
Use social media meaningfully and responsibly

For teens, social media has quickly become one of the main ways they connect with one another and it can make up a lot of our time spent on devices. The following guide can help you and your kids discuss the positives and negatives of social media so that together you can decide how it fits into your lives.
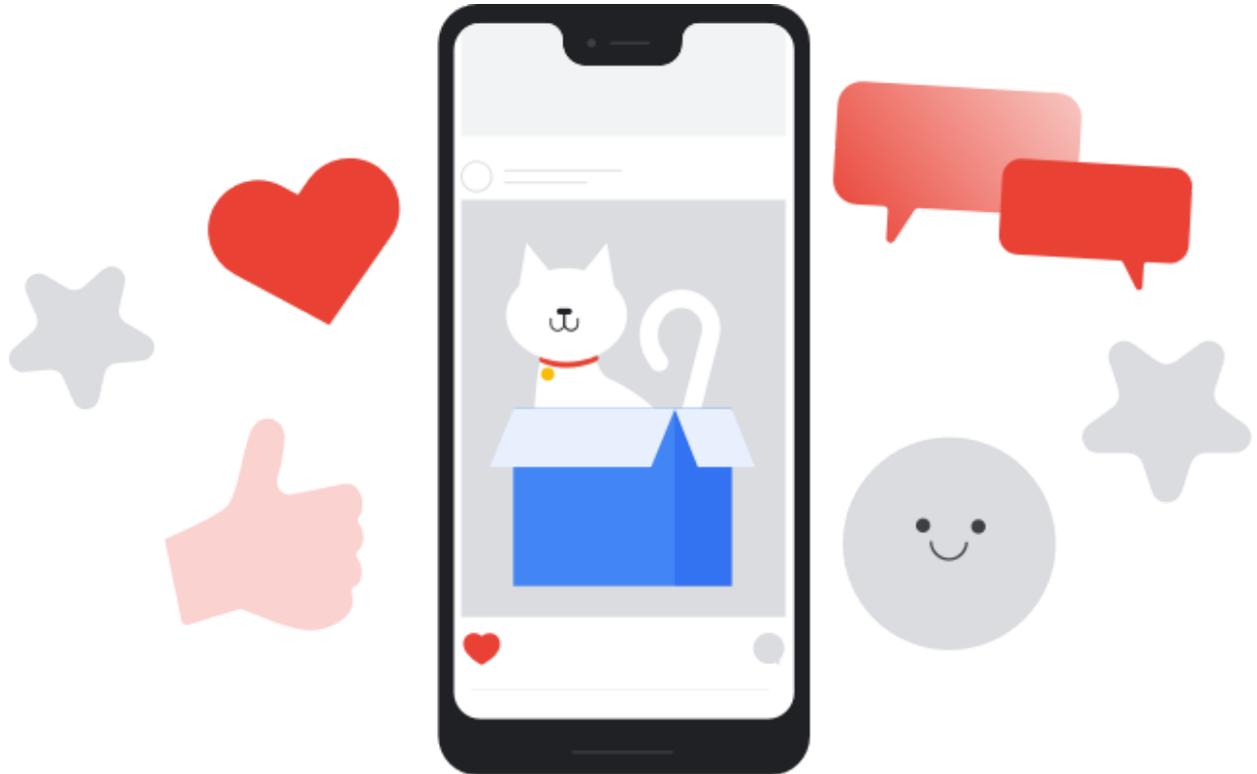
01   # Explore the potential positive uses.

If your kids already use social media, start by asking them how they use social media to make real, positive connections. Share your own experiences. What have been some of the benefits that you've experienced with social media use?

02   # Share your concerns.

What do your kids believe to be some of the downsides of social media? Have they seen or heard of anyone using social media in a way that has hurt someone else or have they seen or heard of anyone getting bullied? Again, share your own experiences. Also, talk about the "fear of missing out" that social media can cause, and how it's a common feeling among kids and adults alike.

03   # Brainstorm ways to connect offline.

Finally, if your kids are ready to start using social media or are already on it, talk about how to know when it might be time to take a break. Explore ways they can stay connected with friends during these times.

Social media is a responsibility.

Just like getting their own device, not every kid is ready to use social media. Make the call based on your kid's ability to handle the responsibility and the complexity of using social media appropriately.

Understand age requirements.

Most platforms have age requirements (generally 13 years old), but in some cases, peers might have access to social media through their parents, older siblings, or otherwise.

Find a positive approach.

There are different ways to use social media. Help your kids choose an approach that is positive for themselves and their relationships with others.

Get help with online security and safety.

For information on teaching your kids about safety (who and what to share online), security (like passwords), and cyberbullying, visit the Be Internet Awesome website and our Safety Center.

"Active mentorship is crucial for kids in the digital age. We want to teach kids to do the right thing, not "catch" them doing the wrong thing."

Devorah Heitner, PhD

Use social media together

Together with your kids, create a list of 5-10 positive things your kids could do using social media. This could be sharing something about anti-bullying, sending a nice message to a relative, or even as simple as liking a friend's photo. If they're ready to start using social media, have them practice by checking off items on this list.

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TOPIC 05

Make gaming a positive experience

Online gaming has become one of the most popular ways for kids to play, but it can also be a concern for parents or a source of tension within families. The following guide can help you and your kids agree on positive ways to game.

01   # Explore the good parts of gaming.

Have your kids talk about the healthy aspects about the games they play. As a prompt, ask about specific elements often found in gaming, such as learning new information, teamwork, and strategy. If you're game savvy yourself, it might also be helpful to talk about specific aspects of games that you think are positive.

02   # What are the not so good parts of gaming?

Now ask them if there are ever times where gaming makes them feel bad or causes conflict with family or friends. Have they ever encountered bullying or threatening language while playing a game? This is also a good time to talk about feeling "left out" if they don't play a certain game or if they have to log off before finishing a level.

03   # Brainstorm positive ways to game.

Talk about ways gaming can benefit your kids when done in a balanced way. Maybe gaming can help them improve at a sport because they better understand the strategies. Maybe it can help with hand-eye coordination or reflexes. Or maybe it can inspire an offline activity with their friends.

Play games together.

Gaming comes in many different forms — some may be more positive than others. To better understand the nuances of your kid's games, try playing as a family.

Understand online gaming.

Many games can now be played against other people (including strangers). Consider this in relation to your kid's level of maturity and ability to judge who they should be engaging with.

Get help with online security and safety.

For information on teaching your kids about safety (who they game with), security (like passwords), and cyberbullying, please visit the Be Internet Awesome website and our Safety Center.

"When your child is involved in a game or online activity, hop on and do it together. What can you learn together with them?"

Natasha Bhuyan, MD

Family game nights

Put family game nights on the calendar and experiment together with different kinds of games. Some nights can involve digital gaming (choose something the whole family will enjoy) and others can be non-digital games (think miniature golf, pickup basketball or simply a deck of cards).
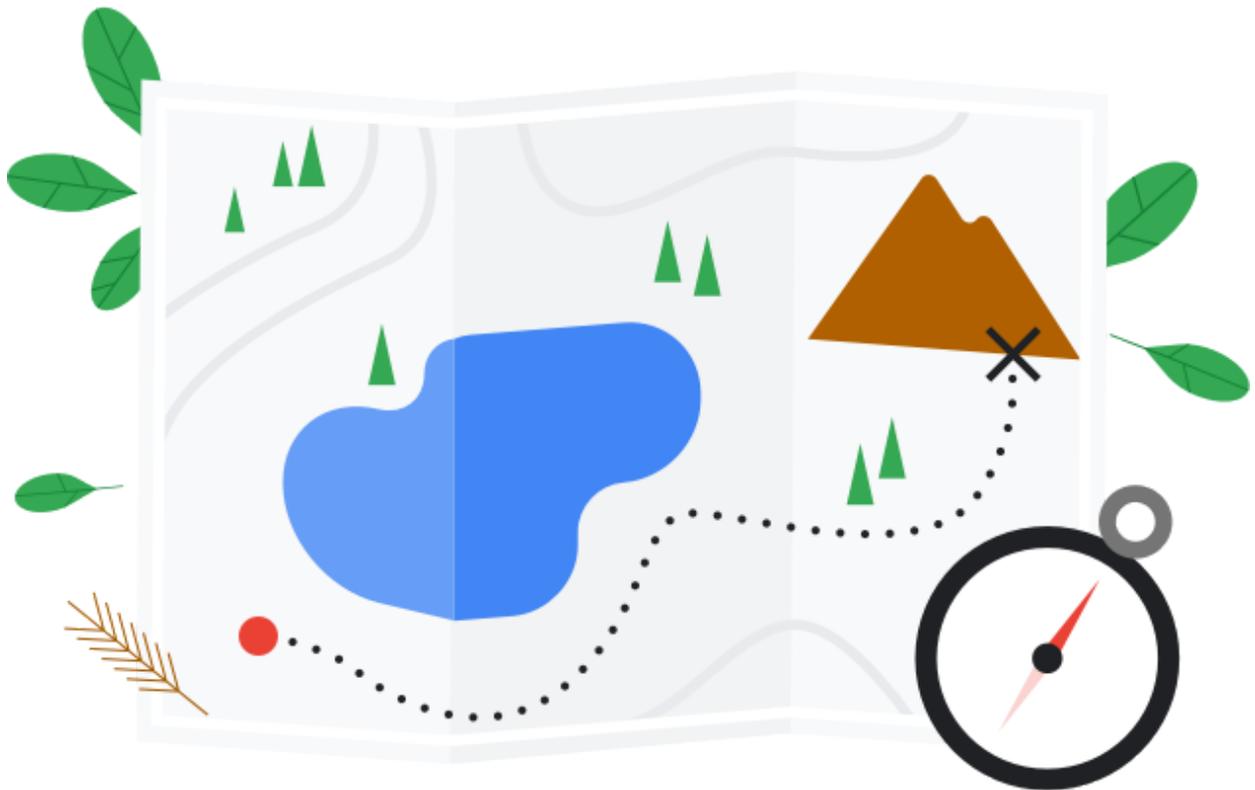
Digital games

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Non-digital games

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Balance offline and online activities

It can sometimes be hard for kids to trade the excitement of the digital world for real-world experiences. This guide will help you and your kids talk about the value of balance, so that they can feel good about unplugging every once in a while.

01   The best parts about being online.

Begin by asking your kids why they use digital devices and what their activities are. What do they think is good about those uses? Make sure you talk about the things your kids do frequently, like streaming videos or gaming.

02   The best parts about being offline.

Next, talk about the offline activities your kids like to do. What is it about these activities that they enjoy? How are they different from what they do online? How do these activities make them feel compared to the online activities?

03   Are you missing out on something?

Discuss with your kids if they ever feel like their digital activities keep them from doing or enjoying things offline. If so, how does that make them feel and why? Then, switch it around: do offline activities ever keep them from digital activities? As always, it's helpful to follow up with how this makes them feel and why.

04   Finding a blend that works.

Lastly, brainstorm ways they can do more of the things they like to do – both offline and online – without feeling like they're missing out on something.

Find what works for your family.

Balance is unique for every family—work together to create your own definition.

Reflect on your habits.

As you're talking with your kids, make sure you're considering your own blend of offline and online activities. Are there things you could do to help model the habits you hope to see your kids adopt?

## Offline and online can work together.

Consider how the offline and online worlds often overlap. For example, you could use your maps app to find new places to explore, or you might use search to find a recipe to cook together.

"Rather than creating a negative frame around time with technology, as parents and digital mentors we should be creating positive, non-digital experiences for kids."

Natasha Bhuyan, MD

Make an offline wish list

Work together to come up with a list of five offline activities your family already loves to do or would like to try. Discuss what you like about each of these activities and how they're both similar and different from online things you all like to do. Hang your list on the refrigerator or a convenient place in the house and start checking them off!
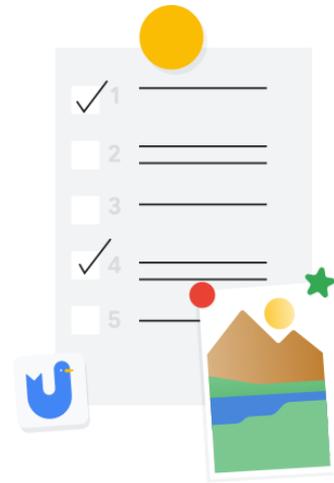
Our offline activities

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