

Fostering healthy digital habits over the holiday season

In the spirit of the festive season, it's tempting to ease up on family tech rules – but it's important not to abandon those rules entirely! Here are our top tips for maintaining balance and healthy digital habits during the festive season.

Review/create family tech agreements

Whether your child will be getting their first tech gift this year, or will be allowed new/expanded tech access, a **family tech agreement** is an essential first step before allowing your child to use tech on their own. If you don't already have one in place, now is the time to create one. Here are some tips for an effective family tech agreement:

Create your agreement as a family: Sit down to come up with the terms together, with input from your children to help them take ownership of creating their own good digital habits. *(Especially important for tweens and teens!)*

Update as your children mature: The holiday season is an excellent time to reflect on what's working well, what can be improved, and what may need to change as your children have grown.

Consider creating a separate agreement for the holidays: Rather than letting the rules slip during the holiday season, create a holiday tech agreement with relaxed rules that apply during this time. Make it fun by adding family challenges such as 'whoever touches their phone during dinner has to clear the table.' Include family tech time such as streaming holiday videos together.

Model good tech habits yourself: It's important for all family members to respect the agreement rules, including parents! Your children will watch and emulate what you do.

Update parental controls

Apps and games are frequently updated by their developers, and sometimes these updates will impact the parental control settings you had in place. Without updated software, parental controls may not work as effectively.

Check your children's devices, apps, and games for updates: Some apps and games will update automatically, while others may need to be installed manually.

Check your own devices and apps for updates: Unless the software updates on your device are set to automatic, you may forget to perform updates periodically. The holiday break is a good opportunity to do so, and remind your partner or co-parent to do the same.

Ensure parental controls are still in place: Once all software updates have been resolved, double check that your parental controls are still active and up-to-date on your children's existing devices, consoles, apps, and games.

Set up parental controls for new gifts: For any new apps and games, set up parental controls before allowing your children access.

Schedule tech timeouts

Even with more relaxed rules during the holidays, it's still important to find a balance. Carve out blocks of time daily for your family to enjoy tech-free (or tech-minimal) activities.

- Activities to do during tech-free time:
- Read
- Listen to music
- Learn a new skill
- Exercise
- Complete house chores
- Take pets out for a walk
- Unleash inner creativity through drawing or writing.

If it's difficult to go entirely tech-free, try connecting online and offline activities to have tech-minimal time:

- Use the internet to find decorating ideas they can recreate at home
- Discover a baking channel with festive recipes they can try
- Use a music streaming service to create a holiday playlist for the family
- Pick out audiobooks to listen to either alone or together
- Download a fitness or wellbeing app to get the whole family moving
- Play a digital game that requires physical activity or movement
- Use an app to find (or create) a scavenger hunt list, and then go for a family walk to find the things on the list

Pro Tip: Our brains experience an energy peak in the morning, making this a fantastic time to set tech aside!

Read the fine print

Reading the tedious terms and conditions is probably the last thing you feel like doing. We've all been there: you have every intention of going back and reading the fine print later once the festivities have died down, but in reality, it's all too easy to forget.

Before your child uses a new app or game, read and understand the **terms and conditions, privacy policy, and community guidelines** as thoroughly as possible (no matter how boring they seem).

Key points to look for when reading:

- The kinds of data the app or game collects from your child
- How that data will be stored and used
- If that data will be shared with any third parties

This will enable you to make informed decisions about how (and if) you will allow your child to use the app or game. Remember, knowledge is power.

Give access, not ownership

Are you giving your child their first smartphone or tablet this year? If you have a younger child, we recommend starting their first online device experience with access rather than full ownership.

This method is valuable for both you and your child, because it:

- Eases them into the responsibility of owning and operating technology
- Teaches them to become a responsible digital citizen who knows how to navigate online risks appropriately
- Allows you to give your child full ownership of their smartphone/tablet once they can demonstrate fundamental responsible online behaviors, such as:
 - Proving they can keep themselves (and others) safe online
 - Showing they know how to respectfully communicate with others
 - Demonstrating they can set healthy screen time boundaries

Consume content together

Do your children complain that their parents don't understand the platforms and games they like to use?

The holiday season is a perfect opportunity to bond as a family by consuming and learning about digital content together! Doing so will help you better understand the platforms they are using and open you to opportunities for casual conversations about your child's online experiences.

Set aside "show and tell" tech time:

- Allow your child to teach you about their favorite apps or show you how to play their favorite online games.
- Play family games: Team up as a family to play an online game together
- Use streaming services: Create movie watch lists you can enjoy as a family