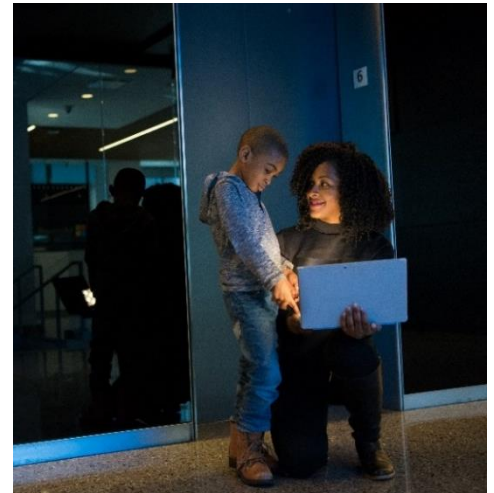


How can I help my child use technology safely?

SickKids Centre for Community Mental Health has worked with lots of families who are interested in limiting screen time or ensuring safe technology use in their homes. Many families who have worked with staff at SickKids CCMH have found these suggestions helpful. Keep in mind your child's age and abilities when applying these strategies. Give them a try and feel free to add your own!

Communicate with your child. Open communication is one of the most important parts of creating a technology-healthy home. It's important that your child feels like they can talk to you about their experiences online and it's important that you teach your child about the pros and cons of online activity.

- Find out what your child already knows about technology and its safe use. Many older children already know quite a bit about what can happen if it's not used safely. Having a non-judgmental conversation with your child or teen will help you understand where their level of knowledge is.
- Talk to your child about the pros and cons of technology. If they understand your concerns they'll be better able to understand why you've put certain rules in place.
- Explain safety concerns in a language that your child can understand. Explain that some people who look like friends online can be dangerous. Encourage your child to talk to you when someone they don't know tries to connect with them or if they see something that disturbs them.
- Stay calm and try not to overreact when your child tells you about something upsetting they saw online. Thank them for telling you about it and try to explain the material in an age-appropriate way. Removing their access to technology or otherwise punishing them will only make them less likely to tell you about issues in the future.



Be a positive role model. Model the kind of behaviour you want to see in your child. Showing your child that there is a way to have fun with technology while being safe will make them more likely to follow your lead.

- Be aware of your own technology use. Do not use technology while at the dinner table or while having conversations with your child. Implement a "device parking lot" where the family leaves their electronics during important family times. Modelling good behaviour will help your child get in the habit of setting their own technology limits.
- Understand what your child is doing online. Learn about the apps, sites and games they use and the people they talk to. You could even participate in some online activities or games with your child. Your child will be more likely to listen to you if they think you know what you're talking about.
- Be aware of what your child's technology is capable of. Some music playing devices or video game consoles have access to the internet. Check-in to make sure you know exactly what your child is using a device for.

Set clear limits. Limitations are key in developing a healthy relationship with technology. It's not realistic to ask your child to avoid technology altogether but setting clear limits will help keep them safe and healthy. (continued, over)

- Set priorities. For example, homework comes before spending time texting or playing video games. If homework requires typing on the computer, try turning off the internet function to help your child stay focused.
- Have screen-free family time. Instead of watching TV as a family, try going for a walk or playing a board game. You could also have a tech-free zone in your home where your child can go to relax and play.
- Keep computers, tablets, TVs and phones out of bedrooms. Having a computer or tablet in a communal space makes it easier to see what websites and apps are being used. It might be helpful to keep devices in a caregiver's room overnight if your child is having trouble keeping away from their devices at bedtime.
- Set a screen-time budget with your child. For example, only allow one hour of screen time per night or only charge the family tablet every couple of days.
- Set limits on your devices. If you are worried about your child accessing certain websites or channels, add passwords or block them altogether. Online tutorials can teach you how to set up these blocks quickly and easily.
- Many families find it helpful to create a technology use agreement. This will help outline your expectations for your child and lay out clear consequences if these expectations are not met. Parents should also adhere to the agreement! Some families will use a jar to collect coins when any family member breaks the rules. Use the template at this link and adjust it to your family's specific needs. <https://bit.ly/1JPJyr8>



Encourage healthy habits. In a world with so much technology use, it's important for your child to keep active. Try these tips to help keep your child healthy.

- Make sure your child has access to a safe space to be physically active. Try signing them up for group sports at your local community centre or park. This will encourage them to keep a balance between online activity and physical activity.
- Make sure to have healthy snacks at home. Sometimes when your child is online or watching TV, they can forget about what they're eating and end up eating junk food. Try giving your child carrot sticks while they're playing video games instead of junk food.
- Encourage your child to take activity breaks even while using technology. If they're doing homework on the computer have a jumping jack contest or dance break every 30 minutes. This will keep them from sitting still for too long.
- Parents should be modeling all of these behaviours themselves with their own technology use!

Further resources

Check out these links for more helpful hints on how to manage technology at home.

1. Media Smarts: Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy www.mediasmarts.ca
 2. Video Gaming: How to Make Healthy Choices <https://bit.ly/2PHxYHW>
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