Building Healthy Habits Around Media Together

Our Family's Digital Well-Being Journey

INSIDE YOU'LL FIND:

- Parent Tips & Strategies
- Mini-Activities for Children
- Links to Online Resources

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Welcome, Parents & Caregivers!

Just like family dinners or a trip to the supermarket, digital media is part of your family's everyday life—and you might find yourself asking more questions and making more decisions about how your family uses technology.

In our ever-changing world, there are always new ways to connect, play, learn, and relax, whether with digital media or not. Use this guide to spark curiosity about your family's technology use and explore ways to help children build healthy, balanced media habits.

Check out more resources on digital well-being and new technology.

What Is Digital Well-Being?

We all want our children to be well—healthy in mind, body, and heart—and there are so many ways we make that happen. We offer nutritious food, help them stay connected to loved ones, and help them feel safe. And another way of keeping them well is thinking about how they use digital media.

Because technology affects children's brain development and the ways they connect with others, digital well-being is part of the bigger picture of emotional well-being. Digital well-being is about how media and technology can affect our lives in a healthy way. It's about understanding and using media and technology as a part of family life to learn, play, and be together. As you explore these pages together and think about your family's digital well-being journey, you might ask yourself...

Before beginning any important journey, it helps to have expert advice! Since children grow and learn so much in the early years, it's great to be mindful of how media use impacts children's learning and growth.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has developed guidelines for creating your own media habits with your family.

The 5 Cs of Media Guidance

Check out the full guidelines here or at aap.org/5Cs (you'll also find age-by-age guides).

1. Child

Every child is different! (For instance, some toddlers are obsessed with media and demand it frequently, others have an easier time letting it go.)

Think about how your child reacts to media, and what their motivations are for using it.

2. Content

Well-chosen educational programs can teach skills, lessons, facts, healthy behaviors, and how to manage emotions. Content matters, and it helps to know your child and how different types of media affects them. When choosing what children engage with, consider: is the pace of the show too fast and overstimulating? Is the story too scary?

When children watch online videos, turn off autoplay so that the algorithm doesn't automatically decide what your child watches next.

3. Calm

How does your child calm their emotions? This is a crucial age for helping young children know their emotions and figure out how to manage them. Minimize using screens to distract or comfort your child when they're bored or upset.

Keep screens for regular times of day or when you're on a long trip.

4. Crowding Out

Consider what media may be getting in the way of. Screen time may take away time for important activities like playing, movement, outdoor play, exploring nature, looking at books, and talking to family and friends.

Set aside time each day to move, go outside, cuddle, or share books together.

5. Communication

While technology may continue to change, some things stay the same. Stay connected as a family by talking often about media with your children.

Show you're interested! Ask questions about what your child is watching and doing. Afterward, do something together off-screen that's related to the show or game.

Building Digital Well-Being: 6 Habits of Mind

You already help your child develop so many healthy habits, from choosing nutritious food to having a predictable bedtime routine. You can also build healthy habits around digital media. As you go through the pages, think about how your family can practice them... and enjoy the journey!

1

Habit 1: C Is for Choices

Create awareness of all the daily decisions we make for ourselves and our children—choices involving media or not—and the reasons behind them. What do our choices say about what is important to us and how we spend time together?

2

Habit 2: Notice

Practice becoming aware of how we feel in all different situations (including when using media) and make choices considering those feelings.

3

Habit 3: Make Connections

Think about all the ways we as a family connect with one another and with others near and far, and consider how to use media as a tool for bonding, engaging, and staying in touch.

4

Habit 4: Talk About It

Talking with children about what they're watching, playing, or listening to helps you learn more about their interests and experiences, and to better understand the role of media in their lives.

5

Habit 5: Switch It!

Help children transition from one activity to another and offer ways to make transitions smoother.

6

Habit 6: Learn Along the Way

Stay curious and flexible as you consider what's working, what's not... and what's next!

Habit 1: C Is for Choices

You make so many daily decisions for your children—what they eat, what they wear, who they're with, and so much more. You also make choices involving their media use.

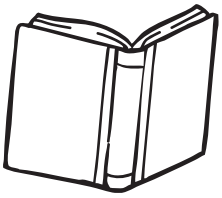
Being aware of the concept of choices is the first step in making healthy ones. This 3-step strategy can help little ones make choices big and small.

State the choice: Children point to themselves, say "I have a choice," and describe the situation.

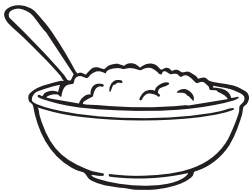
Think about what might happen after the choice is made: Children point to their temple as they say, "I think about my choices."

Choose what's best: Children hold their hands in the shape of a heart as they decide "what's best for me."

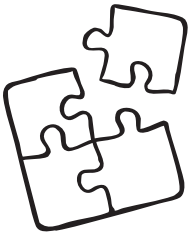
HELP ELMO MAKE A CHOICE Elmo and his daddy have some time to play together on Elmo's tablet. They have three choices: read a story on screen together, watch cooking videos, play a game on screen. Color the thing you think Elmo should choose. And because Elmo loves doing something special with Daddy when they turn off the tablet... try the idea under your choice, too!



Tell each other a favorite familiar story, or take turns making up a story.



Talk about what meal or snack you might want to make together soon.



Name all the ways you like to play together. How many can you name?

Habit 2: Notice

Being aware of our thoughts and feelings can help us make healthy choices. As the media landscape changes quickly with artificial intelligence and emerging technologies, paying attention to how we use it helps us decide our relationship with it. By helping children notice their thoughts and feelings, we teach that we control our media use, not the other way around.

TRY THIS! When children have been on screen for a while, share this rhyme and help them notice how they're feeling: Sometimes we have to stop and take a breath... see how we feel and choose what to do next!

Habit 3: Make Connections

Technology can help us stay in touch with loved ones far away, of course, but it's also often part of our daily life with each other right at home. Both children and adults need time together and time alone. It can be helpful to think about how everyone in the family uses media in different ways, at different times, for different reasons.

Me Time: You might use technology for self-care, personal growth, or just relaxation or entertainment. This might include using apps for meditation, reading e-books, or watching favorite shows.

You Time: When children are playing or watching media independently, you can choose quality content and make sure they are staying safe.

Us Time: Playing games, watching movies, or have virtual family reunions together can become valuable, joyful bonding time.

TRY THIS! Take a Break! At mealtime and other times your family is all together, it's great to focus on connecting in person. Consider putting devices in a "parking lot" (a basket or box away from the table). Remind children how much you value this special "us time"!

Habit 4: Talk About It

Asking questions about what your children are watching or doing—whether they're on a screen or at the playground—shows them you care. Being interested and curious helps you understand what they like and why. When children are on screen, these conversations help you reflect on the role of media in your family's life.

Show me the video you just watched and pause at your favorite part.

Who's that character we see on the screen? Do you like what they are doing?

Tell me how you play this game.

Show me how to play this game. What's easy about this game? What is hard?

Let's hit pause. What do you think will happen next?

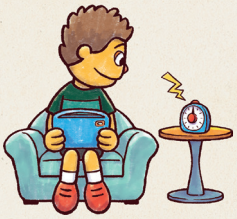
What might we watch or do together to learn more about [topic of video]?

What's your favorite part of this game? Is there anything you don't like about it?

When we turn off the tablet, how could we keep playing in a way that felt a little bit like the game?

Habit 5: Switch It

Screen time is exciting for little ones, so it's no surprise that they can have big feelings when it's time to move on to the next activity! A three-step routine can help. Repeat and practice these steps together with their motions.

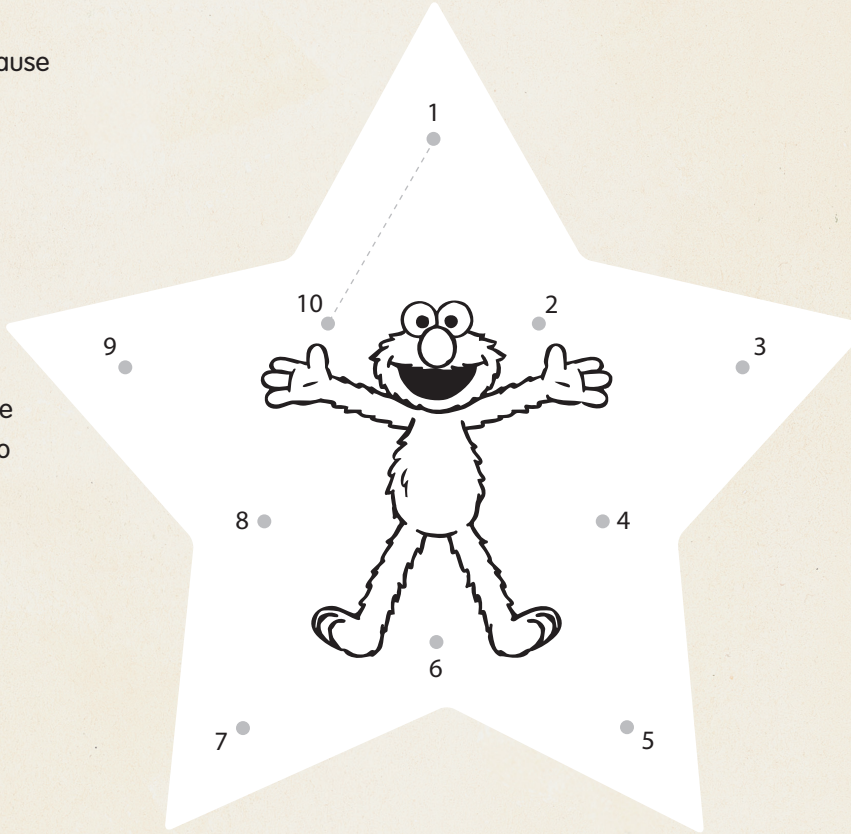


Stop: Recognize the signs (in your body or simply because it's time for something different) that it's time to take a screen break.

Stretch: Stand up and do a whole-body stretch—raise your arms wide like a star! Then, gently tilt your head to one side and to then the other to stretch your neck.

Switch: Get curious about your next activity. Ask, "What comes next?" Your enthusiasm can help: "I'm getting really excited about our yummy lunch, how about you?"

AND TRY THIS! Talk about how much time your child can be on screen and what will happen after ("you can play for 10 minutes before dinner, then when you hear the sound it's time to put it in the parking lot"). Together, agree on a signal when it's time to stop using it (set a phone timer or one that's built into the device).



Elmo's Star Stretch Connect the dots to show the kind of big stretch Elmo does when it's time to turn off.

Habit 6: Learn Along the Way

Your whole family is learning and growing every day. You can always step back, reflect on how things are going, and make changes. You don't have to have it all figured out right now, and you can make small changes along the way.

Guide your family's digital well-being journey by staying curious and flexible. As your children grow and as technology changes, you'll have many opportunities to consider what's working, what's not, and what's next!

Check out these ideas you might use on your road to greater digital well-being as a family. Check any you're ready to try.

I can try to...

- watch/play along with my child and ask questions about what they are doing
- use some of our family's travel time for talking, playing games, sharing stories and making up our own
- learn more about my child's media use
- have my child use only one screen at a time

I can learn more about...

- choosing quality videos, apps, and games on commonsensemedia.org
- setting up parental controls
- new games, apps, or videos by reviewing them before I buy them or let my child play/watch them

I can avoid...

- keeping television on simply "in the background"
- using screens at mealtime
- having screens in the bedroom (the light from screens impacts sleep)
- letting my child have open access to a tablet or phone