

5 Ways to Help Your Child “Unplug” From Electronics



While many children and teenagers use mobile devices as their primary connection to the world, excessive use may be harmful. A study by Clinical Psychological Science found that kids who spent time on social media daily were 13% more likely to report high levels of depressive symptoms. In addition, kids who spent 3 hours or more a day on electronic devices, for any purpose, were 34% more likely to suffer at least one suicide-related outcome.

“Unplugging” from electronics has been shown to improve mood, relationships, and self-esteem. If you feel your child spends too much time on the phone, try these 5 tips to help them disconnect:

- 1** **Choose an amount of time that you are comfortable with your child using a cell phone or tablet each day. Using a timer can be a great way to keep a time limit on electronic use. Consider making use of technology a privilege that can be earned. Always follow through on the limits that you set!**
- 2** Schedule times of the day that are “cell-phone free” and put your cell phone down during these times, too! If your child sees that you take “unplugging” seriously, it will help them follow your example.
- 3** **Keep “screen time” to public parts of the house. Allow laptops, tablets, and phones to be used only in areas where you or a trusted adult can monitor what your child is doing and how much time they are spending online.**
- 4** Monitor what activities mobile devices have replaced in your child’s life, and encourage free time to be spent outdoors or offline. Unstructured free time is shown to combat feelings of stress. When this time is replaced by passive digital use such as social media, children lose out on the social, emotional, and developmental benefits of interacting with friends and family in person. Ensure a balance between online and offline activities.
- 5** **Studies show that cell phone use right before bed decreases sleep quality and can increase your child’s anxiety. When it is time for bed, keep your child’s cell phone out of the bedroom. Invest in a digital alarm clock to replace a cell phone alarm.**

Children who are used to spending a lot of time on devices often feel lost when they are first asked to take a break, so be sure to suggest alternate activities such as playing sports or board games with others, even you! Engaging your children in new hobbies can provide structured time away from technology, while boosting their self-esteem and confidence.

Jenna Meyerberg is a Licensed Professional Counselor specializing in treating children, adolescents, and families. Her research focuses on the impact of social media on mood, behavior, and self-esteem. In addition to helping parents counteract the negative effects of technology, she helps families recover after divorce, life transitions, and challenging behaviors. She practices in Ocean County, NJ.

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