

Teens and Technology

Supporting Healthy Tech Habits with the Power of Pause

Teens use technology for lots of different reasons. They use technology to learn, do work, connect with friends, and have fun. The teenage years are also an age when kids crave independence. This may mean they're using technology more on their own.

When you get in the habit of pausing to notice their technology use AND pausing to get curious and talk with them about it, you help your teen build healthy technology habits.

HERE'S HOW TO DO IT.



STEP 1

Pause & Notice

WHY

When you pause to notice how, when, and why your teen is using technology, you start to understand their technology habits. This is a key first step in helping to ensure your child is using technology in safe, positive, and responsible ways.

HOW

As you go about your day, pause to notice:

- *When does my teen use technology?*
- *What do they use it for?*
- *What do they seem to enjoy about it?*
- *How does technology seem to make my teen feel? Do they seem excited, tired, energized, irritable, distracted?*
- *Is technology getting in the way of my teen doing other important things? Are they still able to do things like get enough sleep, complete schoolwork, spend time with friends and family, and be active?*

If using social and digital media is negatively impacting your child's mental health or their ability to get daily tasks done, **reach out**. You might speak with their pediatrician or counselor for help putting the right supports in place. They'll be able to guide you through next steps.

STEP 2

Pause & Check-In



WHY

Having open and on-going conversations with your teen about technology has so many benefits. It lets them know you're interested in their perspective. They'll also know that you're there to listen and offer support if needed. It helps you learn more about your teen's experiences and ideas. It opens the door for you to stay in the loop and be an ongoing support!

HOW

Look for a calm moment to check-in with your teen about technology. Ask questions that get at their thoughts and feelings. Sometimes teens can feel more ready to share during a walk or car ride. Sometimes they aren't in the mood to share. That's okay. Try another calm moment on another day.

Here are some questions you might try:

- *What apps do you like to use?*
- *What do you like about technology?*
- *Is there anything about technology that feels hard or overwhelming?*
- *What feels like the right amount of time to spend on technology? What amount of time feels healthy to you?*

★ Listen as they share. As best as you can, try to remain interested and curious. If they mention an app or game that you don't know about, find out more. Can they show or explain it to you? If they enjoy watching videos online, ask them to share a few of their favorites with you.

★ This can also be a great time to remind your teen, "I'm always here to listen and help if anything happens online that makes you feel concerned or upset. I'm also here if you have questions or just want to talk."

★ What you notice and learn as you talk together might suggest that your teen may benefit from a shift in some of their technology habits.

It's important that teens know to **say something** if they see or experience cyberbullying or anything that feels inappropriate or unsafe. Remind them that they can always reach out to an adult for support. Here's a great resource on cyberbullying for parents and kids:

Cyberbullying 

<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/cyberbullying.html>



STEP 3

Pause to brainstorm new habits together

WHY

If technology is making it hard for your child to get things done, feel good, sleep, or have fun with others, it may be time to shift some habits. It's okay to set boundaries. Talking about the reasons for creating new habits together helps your teen to better understand and accept any changes.

Your teen is growing and changing. Their habits can shift as well. **It's important to stay curious and connected.** So keep pausing to notice, check-in, and chat.

HOW

Here are some common technology habits that families try to build and example reasons why. You can use these as sparks for your new habits.

HABIT	REASON
No technology during family meals	When we eat as a family it's fun to spend time together and talk without distractions.
Bedtime is a tech-free zone	A good night's sleep helps everyone to feel ready to take on the day.
Setting time limits for "just for fun" technology use	Gaming is fun and I totally understand why you enjoy it. It's also really healthy for us to do many different activities. Let's limit gaming to X minutes a day.
Setting goals around technology	Having fun together is important. Let's try one tech-free family activity a week for the next month and see how it goes.



To learn more about technology and creating a family technology plan, visit: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/fmp/Pages/MediaPlan.aspx>



The power of pause is great for your teen too! It helps them make safe and responsible choices. Here are 3 great ways for teens to use the power of pause as they use technology.

1

Pause before Posting or Pressing Send

Getting teens in the habit of stopping to think about what they put online before they press post or send can stop mistakes before they happen.

Encourage your teen to pause and ask themselves questions like:

- *Would I say this to someone's face?*
- *If someone said this to me, would I be okay with it?*
- *If I took 10 minutes to cool off, would I still send this?*
- *Would I want someone I care about and respect to see this?*



If the answer is “no” then the post is a no-go. This habit empowers kids to think through the potential consequences of their actions before they say or do something they might regret later.

Pause to Notice

2

The pull of the online world can be hard to resist for many teens. Kids start out looking for one thing and before they know it, they're watching cat videos again. It happens. With your encouragement, your teen can build the habit of pausing to notice these moments. Encourage your teen to notice:

- *How long have I been using technology?*
- *How is this making me feel?*
- *Does this seem safe? Reliable? Okay?*
- *Is it time to step away? Take a break?*
- *Is there something else I need to be doing right now?*
- *Is there something else I'd like to be doing right now?*



These questions help empower teens to make responsible tech choices more independently.

Social media can lead to ups and downs. It's important that teens know, if social media starts leading them to have negative thoughts and feelings about themselves, they should reach out to an adult for support.

3

Pause to Play

Healthy technology use is all about balance. Encouraging kids to do things offline, whether it's play, read a book, or hang out with friends, supports that balance. Together, make a list of the tech-free things your child enjoys doing. When you or they notice a break time is needed, invite them to try something from the list.

