

Digital Parenting and Device Wrangling



In an increasingly digital landscape, supporting children to develop healthy screen habits is a critical skill for every family. This document serves as an essential resource, providing ten practical, research-informed strategies and examples for effective implementation at home. Our aim is to empower you to establish clear digital boundaries, foster meaningful family communication, and guide your children toward balanced and sustainable technology use.

- **Collaborate on a Family Media Agreement:** Create a written plan together so children feel ownership over the rules.
 - *Example:* Sit down on a Sunday, discuss healthy limits, write down a rule like "No phones at the dinner table," and have everyone sign it. Come up with a few more, and let your children be involved - they are more likely to follow rules they helped create.
- **Define the "When, Where, and Why":** Explicitly state where devices can be used and explain the reasoning behind the rule to teach values.
 - *Example:* Instead of saying "Because I said so," say, "You can't use your phone at night because your body needs sleep to learn and grow" or "It's okay to enjoy screens, but it's also important to know when to take a break"
- **Establish consequences in advance:** Agree on fair penalties before rules are broken so there are no surprises. It is best to do this when everyone is calm!
 - *Example:* If your child breaks the rule by bringing their iPad into their bedroom, the pre-agreed consequence is that the iPad is put away for the entirety of the next day.
- **Enforce rules calmly and consistently:** Apply the consequence matter-of-factly without lecturing or yelling to minimise power struggles.
 - *Example:* When screen time is over, simply hold out your hand and say, "Time's up," without getting pulled into an argument about them needing to finish a level. Be consistent and calm. If your child needs a "buffer zone", time to wrap up, warning periods or flexibility, arrange this in advance rather than while they are absorbed in their activity.
- **Use tech tools as a safety net:** Don't rely purely on willpower; use built-in controls to automatically shut off access. Phones, tablets, games consoles have parental controls, wireless routers and internet service providers can also offer filtering software and internet controls.
 - *Example:* Use Apple's "Downtime" or Android's parental controls to automatically lock your child's phone at 8:00 PM every night.



- **Protect sleep routines fiercely:** Establish a firm boundary that all screens must be turned off at least an hour before bed to protect their rest.
 - *Example:* Set up a family charging station in the kitchen where everyone, including parents, plugs their phones in for the night.
- **Approach with curiosity, not criticism:** Ask open-ended questions about what they are doing online to reduce defensiveness. Watch them play from time to time to build that bond or even a possible shared interest.
 - *Example:* Instead of shouting, "You've been on that game too long!", ask, "Wow, you love that game, what do you like most about it? Do you want to show me something about it before you turn it off?"
- **Target the device's design, not the child:** Remind them that apps and games are deliberately designed to be habit-forming, making it a team effort against the tech.
 - *Example:* When they struggle to log off, say, "These devices are designed to suck us in and make us want more. Let's take a break together,". Social media, games and other devices are addictive, and have been created this way intentionally.
- **Avoid using screens as digital pacifiers or comforters:** Do not use devices as a tool to calm an upset child; encourage offline self-regulation instead. Allowing children access to screens in order to calm themselves down is not sustainable - there are going to be times when the screen isn't there!
 - *Example:* If your toddler is having a meltdown, offer a book, a game outdoors, or a cuddle rather than handing them a smartphone to keep them quiet.
- **Model the behaviour you expect:** Children notice your habits, so demonstrate the tech boundaries you preach.
 - *Example:* When going out for a family walk, announce, "I'm putting my phone away so we can enjoy the afternoon," showing them that unplugging is a family value. Children will notice if you're telling them they can't use their phone or their tablet if you're doing it while clutching your own device! Lead by example.

For more information, or to book a place on one of our parenting courses, contact Tom Maybey, the Richmond Parenting Lead at Tom.Maybey@achievingforchildren.org.uk or 07864 609 913

