



Creating a Technology-Alternative Lifestyle in Your Home



- ➡ Does your child spend **too much time** on devices such as phones, tablets, computers or gaming consoles?
- ➡ Does your child **struggle** when you try to limit or remove access to these devices?
- ➡ Does it feel like your child **constantly complains** when he or she is not connected to technology at home?

If you answered “Yes” to any of these questions, you are not alone.

While some parents may long for the days of limited technology and no cell phones, that is not the norm for kids today. Most children spend a significant amount of time in front of a screen, a routine that usually starts at an early age and continues into adulthood. Working on devices also is part of a child’s school day, so access to technology is ongoing and constant.

Given this culture, it is very important for parents to learn more about technology – the good and the bad – and incorporate what they learn into how they raise their children. One challenge parents commonly face is getting their children to spend less time on technology and spend more time on alternative activities. And while there is no way to completely separate kids from technology, there definitely are ways to create a technology-alternative lifestyle that brings a happy, healthy balance to children’s lives.

What is a technology-alternative lifestyle? In its simplest definition, it’s a lifestyle that includes more “unplugged” time in a child’s (and a family’s) life! It’s doing the things kids miss out on when social media and other forms of technology occupy a big part of their world.

This includes having face-to-face contact and conversations with others, strengthening family relationships and connecting with personal and family values. A technology-alternative lifestyle can help families find more time to be together, which can lead to important experiences that help shape a child’s or a teen’s healthy behaviors.

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Technology-Alternative Tips

Here are some tips for creating a technology-alternative lifestyle in your home:

- **Make “together time” a habit.** Together time can take on many different forms. Find activities that everyone in your family can enjoy, like cooking and eating meals together, playing a game, reorganizing a room, going for a family bike ride or watching a movie together. These types of activities encourage conversation and present opportunities for you to give specific praise to your child for being with you. They also help your child understand that family time can be joyful and rewarding.
- **Share responsibilities and chores.** Being part of a household means taking care of the house. Set a chore hour when everyone takes care of an assigned task, or work together to tackle a bigger job like spring cleaning. Attack kitchen clean-up as a team or divide and conquer as you clean and organize the family room. The important element here is that your family is doing something together.
- **Get active.** There’s more to life than what happens in front of a computer, TV or phone screen. Social media should not replace spending face-to-face time with others and having personal interactions. Encourage your child to get out there and attend school events, get involved in extracurricular activities or plan outings with friends. If your child has creative interests like painting or music, work together collaboratively to find opportunities for growing those talents.
- **Set realistic, meaningful limits on technology use.** Technology is a major part of our world, and your child or teen will always want to use it. You can head off arguments by setting reasonable limits and helping your child develop healthy media habits. Set time limits on technology use, give phones a “bedtime” before your child’s bedtime and create a technology-free zone, such as at the dinner

table or during a family activity. Teach your child that there are certain situations where using devices is appropriate and other situations where it is not appropriate, and discuss these situations as a family. Set your expectations for technology use in the same way you establish house rules for watching TV, completing homework or doing chores.

- **Be a role model for your kids!** Kids who see their parents demonstrate healthy technology habits are more likely to do the same. While it seems simple, parents sometimes forget how important it is to show their children the behaviors they expect them to use. Establish habits like setting limits on your own phone use in the evening and/or on weekends. When you’re on your phone, you might even ask yourself, “Do I need to be on my phone right now?” Given the right environment and positive role models, kids can quickly learn the importance of balancing technology use.
- **Open the conversation and join in.** Encourage your child or teen to talk about what he or she learns from or finds interesting on social media. Also, discuss how to use technology safely and how to manage potentially tricky (or even dangerous) situations. The most important aspect of child and teen technology use is good decision-making. Children are most likely to make good decisions with technology when parents keep the door open for communication.

Additional Resources

- commonsensemedia.org
- internetmatters.org
- *The Art of Screen Time* by Anya Kamenetz

➡ **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.

