

# Striking a digital balance: supporting teenagers in a connected world



Growing up and maturing comes with greater rights and freedoms – be it choosing the subjects they study at school, getting a learner’s licence, or earning money from a part-time job. However, all these things come with responsibilities – and learning how to make sensible choices about these things is a key part of growing up.

This is true when young people are using tech, too. While you may have less oversight on just how your teen spends their time, you can still ensure they are positively engaging online and meeting other commitments in their life too.

## How much time is too much?

While there are recommendations for “screen time,” it’s important to understand that these guidelines primarily refer to recreational, sedentary use and do not include school-related activities.

Instead of focussing on the quantity of time spent on screens, encourage your teen to consider the purpose of their tech use and balance it with other important aspects of their life:

- Sufficient sleep: Are they getting enough restorative sleep to support their overall well-being?
- Homework: Are they dedicating enough time to complete their school assignments?

- Physical exercise: Are they engaging in regular physical activity to keep their bodies healthy?
- Family engagement: Are they actively participating in shared family activities and mealtimes?

Additionally, be aware that the type of digital activities they engage in can influence their mood, energy levels, and habits – sometimes positively, and sometimes negatively.

- Social media impact: Some social media posts can foster comparison and trigger feelings of insecurity, affecting mental health.
- Design features: Certain games and apps use features like winning streaks or rewards to create addictive behaviours.
- Creative expression: Technology provides accessible platforms for creativity and sharing with others.

## Guiding your teen’s tech use

Help your teenager navigate the digital landscape by using a balanced and mindful approach that combines their autonomy with your guidance:

- Collaborative rule-setting: Work together to establish rules about when, where, and how long tech can be used. Ensure these guidelines are regularly revisited to acknowledge your teen’s growth and changing needs.
- Self-monitoring: Encourage your teen to self-monitor their tech usage using tools like timers or calendar reminders. Check-in with

them regularly, providing gentle reminders about the reasons behind the rules rather than resorting to threats or bans.

- **Reality check:** Ask your child to estimate their device usage and then use the built-in screen time monitoring features to compare their estimate with the actual usage. This exercise can serve as a wake-up call and motivation to set realistic goals.
- **Body awareness:** Encourage your teen to periodically check in with their physical sensations and emotions while using specific apps or games. If they experience discomfort or negative feelings, it may be a signal to reassess and make changes.

By fostering open communication and a balanced approach to technology, you can help your teenager navigate the digital world while prioritising their well-being and overall development.



### Key takeaways:

1. **Focus on purpose:** Encourage your teenager to think about the purpose of their tech use and how it aligns with their overall well-being and responsibilities.
2. **Consider the impact:** Recognise that different types of tech activities can have varying effects on mood, energy, and habits. Help your teen understand these influences and make informed choices.
3. **Collaborative rules:** Work together with your teenager to establish clear rules about when, where, and how long tech can be used. Regularly revisit and adjust these rules to accommodate their growth and changing needs.
4. **Self-monitoring:** Empower your teen to self-monitor their tech usage using tools like timers or calendar reminders. Offer gentle reminders of the purpose behind the rules, rather than resorting to strict bans or restrictions.
5. **Tune into body signals:** Encourage your teenager to regularly check in with themselves while using apps or games and pay attention to how it makes them feel physically. If discomfort arises, help them identify necessary adjustments to maintain balance and well-being.

### Telstra tech talk

Technology platforms like Microsoft, Apple, and Google which design the operating systems that run iPhone, iPads, and most other phones have built-in family controls that allow parents to set screen time limits and content restrictions on platforms like YouTube.

Game platforms like Xbox also offer similar family controls and can generate screen time reports showing the games and apps most used and when. Individual apps may also contain screen time restrictions so be sure to explore your options.

