

## Screen Time! What's A Parent To Do?

Teens are spending more time on screens than ever before, and it is important to **limit the amount of time** your adolescent spends socializing on the computer, using phone apps, playing video games and watching television. Studies have shown that **excessive media use can lead to learning and attention problems**, lack of sleep and obesity. While eliminating all electronic usage is almost impossible, you can help address this issue by **establishing rules and routines** and choosing screen activities carefully. Setting limits on the amount of time your teen spends on electronic devices will help him become a more responsible user.

Monitor your child's electronic activity, and your own, too. There is no doubt that adolescents love technology, but giving them free rein to do whatever they want with electronic devices may not be for the best.

Author Faye de Muyschondt suggests that you have your child sign a **digital contract** to help provide him with a blueprint of appropriate online behavior. Tom Hoerr, who is Head of School at New City School in St. Louis, Missouri, recommends that if you want your child to limit or cut back on screen time, you may need to be prepared to make the same sacrifice. He adds that your needs and schedule may be different from your child's, but that distinction can be hard for adolescents to see. Hoerr says that showing that you are willing to do this sends a powerful message and makes it more likely that your child will comply. You may also want to have a clear understanding about sites that are acceptable and ones that are not, and block any sites that you find inappropriate.

Education consultant Jennifer Miller adds that you should treat the digital community as you would any other community involved in your child's life, and **get involved so that you know the players and understand the environment**. If your child feels that you are invading his privacy, explain to him that having access to electronic devices is a privilege, and using technology appropriately is the only way to ensure access to it.

Set limits on homework and electronic devices. School counselor Sharon Sevier suggests that you may want to have a central place in the home where you can monitor your child as he does homework. Sevier says that you may also want to **place limits on cell phone use** while your child is doing homework, as this can distract him. This may be the biggest challenge, as adolescents typically love their cell phones, but having him focus on homework instead of what's going on in social media will help him concentrate on the task at hand. Jennifer Miller adds that you may achieve **better buy-in from your child if you involve him in a discussion about the rules and get his input**. Sevier says that adolescents will take homework much more seriously if you put some parameters around how, where, and when they study.

