PRACTICAL GUIDE

A simple yet informative guide

Family Digital Wellness & Healthy Screen Time Guide

Supporting Children with Care, Clarity & Confidence

ditox
DIGITAL DONE WELL

Salfeld
CHILD CONTROL

Why this guide

When it comes to kids and screens, parents can swing one of two ways: go into full lockdown, or just give up and hope for the best. Both reactions come from love, but neither actually works very well.

This guide is about another approach: high warmth combined with high structure. We're skipping the guilt trips and the debates. Instead, you'll find practical tools to build healthy habits together:

01 The 3 Things That Actually Work

02 Scripts For Real Life

03 Tools As Training Wheels

04 The Family Agreement

Technology isn't the enemy. And you don't need to be perfect. Being present and willing to figure this out alongside your kids is often enough. **Let's get started.**

Cheat sheet

If you read nothing else, read this.

The 3 Things That Actually Work

1. **Model it yourself:** Kids copy what you do, not what you say. Your phone habits matter.
2. **Set clear boundaries:** Developing brains need structure. Parental control & screen time tools help enforce limits consistently.
3. **Talk about it:** Rules without explanation backfire. Co-create agreements. Stay curious.

Age	Quick Rule Of Thumb
0–2	No screens, except video calls with family. Prioritize face-to-face.
2–5	Up to one hour a day of high-quality, slow-paced content, watched together.
6–9	Devices in shared spaces, consistent times, you know the passwords.
10–12	Co-create agreements, explain the "why", start safety conversations.
13–17	Focus on balance, gradual autonomy, prepare for independence.

Ages 0 to 5 follow World Health Organization guidance (2019).
For older children, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2026) puts content first, hours second.

START TODAY

Do This Monday Morning

1. **Pick one screen-free zone** (dinner table? bedrooms?) and commit to it. You included.
2. **Install a parental control app** on your child's device. Set one daily limit, just one. Start simple.
3. **Ask your child:** "What app makes you feel good? What one makes you feel worse?"
4. **Schedule a 10-minute family check-in** for Sunday evening.

! Seek help if...

- Every screen conversation explodes into conflict
- Sleep is consistently disrupted
- Signs of cyberbullying
- They can't stop even when they want to
- Mood changes dramatically because of specific apps

CRISIS RESOURCES

United States	United Kingdom	Canada	Australia
988	**0800 1111**	**1-800-668-6868**	**1800 55 1800**

Other countries: findahelpline.com

What Actually Works

01 It Starts With You

A 2024 study in Pediatric Research found that parents' own screen habits (at mealtimes, in bedrooms, throughout the day) were significantly linked to their early teens' screen time and problematic use patterns.

Children notice everything. If you ask them to put down their phone while scrolling through yours, they notice. If dinner is "screen-free for kids" but you're checking emails, they notice.

This isn't about being perfect. It's about being honest.

- If screens are off at dinner, yours is off too.
- Let them see you choose a book, a walk, a conversation.
- Name the difference between intentional use and mindless scrolling.

Small, consistent choices, visible to your children, create ripple effects.

02 Boundaries Do Help

Despite what some parenting philosophies suggest, children need structure. In a US study of more than 10,000 children aged 12 and 13, parents who set limits on screens had children with less screen time and less problematic phone, gaming and social media use. Screens in the bedroom pointed the other way.

Why do boundaries work?

1

Developing brains need support. The prefrontal cortex (impulse control, planning, judgment) isn't fully developed until the mid-20s. Children don't yet have the neurological development for complete self-regulation.

2

Screens are engineered to be compelling. Variable rewards, infinite scroll, social validation: these features exploit vulnerabilities that even adults struggle with.

Parental control tools like Salfeld Child Control can support boundary-setting with screen time limits, content filtering, activity reports. But tools work best as scaffolding for family agreements, not as surveillance or a replacement for conversation.

03 Boundaries Need Conversation

Here's where many parents struggle: they set rules without explanation, or set them once and never revisit them. Research shows this backfires, especially with teens.

Limits without communication can increase secrecy and risk-taking; kids who feel monitored but never talked to just get better at hiding. But when boundaries come with open dialogue, they work.

Four habits make the difference:

1. **Create agreements.** Kids follow rules they helped shape. Decide limits together, not *for* them.
2. **Check in casually.** Car rides, cooking dinner, walks, not formal interrogations.
3. **Increase autonomy over time.** The goal is for them to not need external controls at all.
4. **Stay curious.** "How does that app make you feel?" invites reflection. Lectures don't.

> The goal isn't permanent control. It's teaching children to self-manage, so they're ready when they're fully independent.

The First Smartphone Decision

There's no single right age. Most experts suggest a staged path: a basic phone around 9 to 11, a managed smartphone from 11 to 14, then growing freedom. Readiness matters more than birthdays, so start with these questions.

Questions To Ask Yourself

- Does my child need a phone now, or do they want one? (After-school activities requiring pickup coordination = need. "Everyone else has one" = want.)
- Can they follow current household rules consistently without constant reminders?
- How do they handle frustration and delayed gratification?
- Do they come to me when something goes wrong, or hide problems?
- Am I ready to have ongoing conversations about what they encounter?

The Staged Approach

Most experts recommend a gradual progression rather than jumping straight to a full smartphone.

1. **Shared devices** — Shared device in a common area with parental control. — Ages 5–8
2. **Basic phone** — Calls and texts only. — Ages 9–11
3. **Managed smartphone** — With parental controls. — Ages 11–14
4. **Smartphone with growing freedom** — Gradually loosen restrictions. — Ages 14+

Note: These are suggested age ranges, not strict rules. Every child is different.

What To Say

Parents often tell us the hardest part isn't knowing what to do: it's knowing what to say in the moment. Here are scripts for real situations, tested by real families.

Ages 7–9: Setting First Boundaries

They want more screen time

YOU SAY "I know it's hard to stop when you're having fun. The timer went off, which means screen time is done for today."

THEY SAY "But I'm in the middle of something! Just 5 more minutes!"

TRY THIS "I hear you, it's frustrating to stop. You can finish that tomorrow. Right now, would you rather help me cook or build something with LEGO?"

WHY Young brains lack impulse control, so stopping is physically painful. Offering a choice ("A or B") re-engages their thinking brain and gives them a sense of control, while "finish tomorrow" bridges the gap so it doesn't feel like a permanent loss.

Pre-Teen Negotiations

They see something scary or inappropriate

YOU SAY "You can always tell me if you see something that makes you feel weird or uncomfortable. You won't be in trouble."

TRY THIS "Thank you for telling me. That wasn't meant for kids and it's not your fault you saw it. Let's talk about it, what questions do you have?"

WHY Fear of punishment is the #1 reason kids hide mistakes. By explicitly removing the threat ("you won't be in trouble") and blaming the content/internet instead of the child, you ensure they come to you next time.

They want social media because 'everyone has it'

YOU SAY "I know it feels like everyone is on TikTok. Let's talk about it: what do you think you'd use it for?"

THEY SAY "All my friends are on it! I'm the only one who isn't. It's so unfair."

TRY THIS "That sounds really hard. I'm not saying never: I'm saying not yet. Research shows these apps are designed for older brains. Let's revisit this in 6 months and see where you are."

WHY A hard "No" feels arbitrary and creates rebellion. "Not yet" combined with a specific date feels like a plan. Citing "research" makes it objective facts rather than just your personal opinion.

Teen Autonomy

They refuse to put the phone down at dinner

YOU SAY "Phones away at dinner is our family agreement. It goes for all of us, including me."

THEY SAY "[Eye roll] This is so stupid. None of my friends have to do this."

TRY THIS "Maybe not. In this family, dinner is when we actually see each other. 30 minutes. Then you can get back to it."

WHY Teens spot hypocrisy instantly. If you follow the rule, they have to. Acknowledging they can "get back to it" reduces their FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) and lowers anxiety.

They're angry about parental controls

YOU SAY "I understand you're frustrated with the time limits. They're not punishment, they're guardrails while your brain is still developing."

THEY SAY "You don't trust me! You're treating me like a baby!"

TRY THIS "Actually, I trust you a lot. These limits aren't about trust: they're about the fact that these apps are literally designed by teams of engineers to be hard to stop using. Even adults struggle. This is us working together."

WHY This shifts the conflict from "Parent vs. Child" to "Family vs. Big Tech." It validates their intelligence by treating them as partners against manipulative algorithms.

The Harder Conversations

You're worried they're becoming obsessed with an app

YOU SAY "I've noticed you've been on [app] a lot lately. How are you feeling about it?"

THEY SAY "It's fine. Why are you always on my case?"

TRY THIS "I'm not trying to be on your case. I'm curious: does that app make you feel better or worse after you use it? Be honest."

WHY Lecturing shuts down listening. Asking how they feel triggers self-reflection. Most teens know when an app makes them feel bad; they just need help naming it without feeling judged.

They experienced something negative online

YOU SAY "I'm glad you told me. This isn't your fault and we're going to figure it out together."

THEY SAY "Please don't take my phone away. I didn't do anything wrong."

TRY THIS "I'm not taking your phone. What happened to you isn't okay, and you coming to me took courage. Let's talk about what you want to do next."

WHY The fear of losing their phone (their lifeline to friends) is why teens stay silent about cyberbullying. Removing that threat ("I'm not taking your phone") is the best way to keep them talking to you.

TOOLS AS TRAINING WHEELS

From Theory to Practice: The Role of Tools

You've set the boundaries and had the conversations. But in the heat of daily life, when you're tired and they're cranky, sticking to those boundaries is hard. **This is where parental control tools come in.**

Many parents feel guilty about using parental control software, thinking it means they don't trust their child. Let's reframe that. The best tools aren't about spying or surveillance; **they help families set consistent boundaries:** managing screen time, filtering age-inappropriate content, and gradually giving children more autonomy as they grow.

Think of it less like a security camera, and more like training wheels.

They reduce conflict

When the app turns off the screen at 8 PM, you aren't the bad guy. The agreement is simply being enforced. It removes the daily negotiation.

They support willpower

Even adults struggle to stop scrolling. Expecting a child to out-willpower billion-dollar algorithms is unrealistic. The tool provides the "stop" signal their brain can't generate yet.

Salfeld Child Control is designed to be that flexible support system: focusing on healthy time management rather than invasive monitoring. Setting it up takes about 10 minutes. Here's how to get started with the basics.

1 Install (5 minutes)

Android

1. On your child's device, download "Salfeld Child Control" from the Play Store.

2. Log in (or create an account).

3. Run onboarding and grant permissions.

4. Manage all settings via the Salfeld Web Portal.

Windows

1. Download and open the software from salfeld.com/en/download

2. Log in (or create an account), choose which Windows users to monitor.

3. Hand the PC back to your child.

4. Control all settings via the Salfeld Web Portal.

No Android phone or Windows PC? On iPhone and iPad, use Apple's built-in Screen Time.

2 Set Your First Limit (3 minutes)

Log into the Web Portal at portal.salfeld.net from any browser. Here's what to set up first:

- **Device Limit → Daily Limit:** Set a total screen time for the day (e.g. 2 hours).
- **Device Limit → Blocked Times:** Block late night hours (e.g. 9pm – 7am).
- **Web Filter → Choose a filter level** (Blacklist recommended) and select which web categories to block (e.g. adult content, social media, gambling).

✓ **Start simple.** Don't try to configure everything on day one. Set one daily limit and one blocked time. Add more rules gradually as you see what your family needs.

3 Explore Advanced Features

Time Codes

Grant 6-digit codes to unlock extra screen time whenever you decide it's earned, whether it's for completing homework, helping around the house, finishing outdoor activities, or any milestone that matters to your family.

Bonus Apps

Mark educational apps (Duolingo, Khan Academy) as "Allowed Plus": time spent on them doesn't count toward the daily limit, and can even generate extra screen time as a reward.

App Groups

Organize apps into categories such as Games, Social Media, or Streaming, then set a single shared limit for the whole group instead of managing each app one by one.

Roaming

Apply one shared time limit across phone and computer, so children can't stretch their screen time by switching from one device to another.

Reports and Unlock Requests

Stay informed with optional daily and weekly email reports covering app usage and visited websites, and receive instant email notifications whenever your child requests additional screen time or access to blocked apps or websites.

Salfeld CHILD CONTROL

"But my kid will just crack it."

Most common workarounds (changing the system clock, uninstalling the app, hiding usage in pop-up windows, or switching devices) can be locked down in **Salfeld's Web Portal**. No tool is 100% tamper-proof, but the everyday tricks are covered!

Making It Official: The Family Agreement

You have the technical "guardrails" set up with Salfeld Child Control (or another parental control tool). Now, you need the roadmap. The next step is to write it down.

Why write it down? Because verbal rules are easy to forget (and easy to argue about later). A written agreement moves the conversation from "Because I said so" to "Because this is what we agreed on."

01. Don't just hand it to them. This isn't a parking ticket.

02. Do it over food. Pizza or dessert changes the vibe from "meeting" to "family time."

03. Let them negotiate. If they help shape the rules, they're far more likely to follow them.

04. Everyone signs. If phones are banned at dinner, that applies to parents too.

TEAR-OUT WORKSHEET

Family Media Agreement

PRINT & FILL IN

Date: _____

Screen-Free Zones (check all that apply)

- ☐ Dinner table
- ☐ Bedrooms
- ☐ Car rides under 30 minutes
- ☐ First hour after school
- ☐ Other: _____

Screen-Free Times

Devices off by: _____ pm school nights, _____ pm weekends

Devices on after: _____ am

Daily Limits

Total entertainment time: _____ hrs school days, _____ hrs weekends

Apps We've Agreed On

Allowed: _____

Not yet (revisit in _____ months): _____

Our Agreements

- ☐ No devices during meals together
- ☐ Parents can see/access devices when asked
- ☐ We tell a parent if we see something upsetting online

We'll check in every _____ to see if this is working.

What Happens If We Break the Agreement?

_____

_____

Signatures

_____ _____

Parent Child

When To Ask for Help?

Sometimes screen challenges point to something deeper: severe anxiety, depression, social struggles, family stress. Most children navigate technology fine. But reach out for support if you notice:

Emotional shifts
severe anxiety, sadness, or anger consistently tied to certain apps.

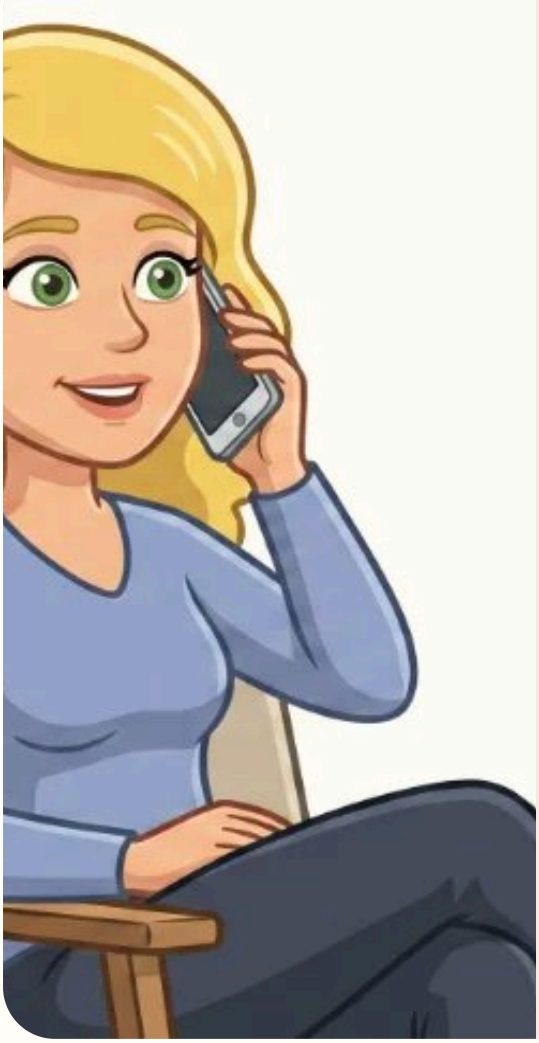
Sleep problems
ongoing disruption despite clear boundaries.

Withdrawal
screens as escape rather than engagement.

Compulsive patterns
can't stop even when they want to.

Cyberbullying: being targeted, or targeting others.

Seeking professional support is strength, not failure. You'd see a doctor for physical concerns; digital wellbeing deserves the same care.



Crisis Resources

If things ever feel serious, reach out; these lines are here for you, any time.

Country	Contact
United States	988 Lifeline: 988
United Kingdom	Childline: 0800 1111
Canada	Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868
Australia	Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800
New Zealand	Youthline 0800 376 633
Other countries	findahelpline.com

Keeping the Conversation Going

Digital wellbeing isn't a one-time setup. It evolves as your kids grow. Brief, regular check-ins (nothing formal) keep communication open and let you adjust before small issues become big ones.

Five questions for any moment:

01 What worked well this week?

02 What felt hard?

03 Did screens support or drain us?

04 Do our agreements need adjusting?

05 What's one thing we'll try next week?

Car rides, cooking, walks. Any quiet moment works. The goal is connection, not perfection.

FAMILY HABITS & COACHING

If you aren't in an extreme crisis but feel "stuck", maybe the arguments are exhausting, or you need guidance to implement these changes, you don't have to do it alone. Ditox specialises in helping families rebuild healthy digital habits through coaching and workshops. Visit ditox.co to learn more.

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Technology isn't the enemy. The same phone that enables mindless scrolling can spark creativity, support learning, and connect your family across distances. The question was never whether kids should use technology. It's how.

Healthy screen habits aren't built overnight. They're built through thousands of small moments of human connection: dinner table conversations, adjustments when something isn't working, mistakes that become learning, and the steady presence of family members who care for each other.

Your children don't need you to be perfect. They need you to be present, patient, and willing to figure this out alongside them.

Congratulations! Your family is progressing towards building the digital wellbeing life you all deserve.

THANK YOU

This guide was created with care by:

ditox
DIGITAL DONE WELL

Family support, workshops & guided programs.

ditox.co

Salfeld
CHILD CONTROL

Screen time limits and parental control for Android & Windows.

salfeld.com

Sources

This guide draws on research including:

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