

Achieving Digital Wellness in Your Family: The Five Most Important Steps

Step 1: Create a Family Media Plan

Step 2: Set up Bedrooms as Sanctuaries

Step 3: Establish Device-free Family Times

Step 4: Regularly Talk about Technology as a Family

Step 5: Check Children's Devices Consistently

Step 1: Create a Family Media Plan

As a family, create a Family Media Plan. Please see our [website](#) for guidance. This plan will be:

- Based on your family values, which you can define using this [worksheet](#)
- Grounded in American Academy of Pediatrics expertise
- Helpful in navigating decisions and consequences about device use

Complete Family Media Plan

Step 2: Set up Bedrooms as Device-free (or -limited) Sanctuaries

Establish bedrooms as a space to disconnect provides important benefits:

- Creates a place for kids, tweens and teens to disconnect and escape the pressures of the online world AND turn to relaxing, restorative offline activities
- Keeps kids safer by limiting unsupervised internet and social media use
- Protects and preserves healthy sleep habits
- Arrange for kids to do online/screen-based homework first so as it gets closer to bedtime, the remaining homework does not require a screen, which interferes with quality and quantity of sleep
- Collect all devices an hour or more before bedtime

How do I work with my child to create a device-free sanctuary?

With so much online homework, it's hard to keep bedrooms device-free.

Talk about it with your child and brainstorm ideas. With kids in elementary and middle school, collect laptops and tablets as soon as schoolwork is complete. For high schoolers, establish a place to stow devices used for school as soon as school is done. Fill rooms with off-screen activities, like books, journals, and maybe a yoga mat. Follow your child's lead.

Establish spaces outside of bedroom, for work requiring device use

Collect devices at least one hour before bedtime

Step 3: Establish Device-free Family Times

Establish device-free family time that is convenient for your family so you can enjoy each other without the distractions of technology. Many families choose mealtimes: put the phones, tablets, and computers elsewhere during the meal, consider silencing or setting phones to “Do Not Disturb” to avoid disruptions.

- ❑ *Make the dining table a device-free zone*
- ❑ *Identify other times throughout the day to reserve for device-free quality time with your child(ren) or family*

Think quality time over quantity. Achieve this in the morning before school, for 15 minutes before bed or in the car. Reserve this time to connect, look into each other's eyes and listen.

Step 4: Commit to Regular Family Conversation about Technology

Growing up in the digital age is not easy. Talk with your kids about it. Remember this is not a fight; it's an opportunity to show compassion, understand and share. Subscribe to Dr. Delaney Ruston's Tech Talk Tuesdays and check out our [conversation starters](#). Make this a regular, periodic practice to promote open ongoing communication about this topic.

- ❑ *Start a conversation with your family about technology. Repeat.*

Step 5: Check Devices Consistently & Follow-up Accordingly

Determine a regular interval of time for checking your children's email, text, and social media, as applicable.

What am I checking for?

The Internet and social media are not designed for children. Online content can be inappropriate and even traumatic. Look for potentially harmful, dangerous or destructive behavior. Bonus: A study found that kids changed their online behavior if they knew their parents were monitoring. When you do find something, collect yourself, keep your child's needs at the center and approach your child with concern. Talk, listen and model appropriate behavior.

- This interval may be based on their track record. For example, start with every other day for two weeks, and with no evident concerns, shift to every third day, and so on.
- The frequency of checks may also be based on age. Younger kids need more frequent checks as they develop their digital citizenship and understanding. Get older teens in the habit of checking and managing their own Screen Time.

- ❑ *Review what your children are posting and seeing online at regular timepoints*
- ❑ *Follow up with parenting steps appropriate to each concern*
- ❑ *Seek professional help, if needed*