

Here are some screen-reduction tips, courtesy of the ASHA Healthy Communication & Popular Technology Initiative:

Model desired tech behavior and values. There's been press lately reframing the technology conversation—it's not kids' overuse but parents' overuse that's the real issue—driving many parents to strive for a better balance. The holidays are the perfect time to model good habits, even if only in the short term when everyone gathers together. Children of all ages closely observe how their parents use technology—and the value they place on it. A recent ASHA-Read Aloud 15 MINUTES national survey found that 41 percent of parents of young children said their kids ask them to put down their devices and interact with them. Make the holidays a time to power down devices and recharge family connections. Spend more time talking and listening.

Plan activities to promote togetherness. Sure, chaos often reigns during the season—and you might feel like you don't need yet another activity—but holidays often mean lots of indoor together time. Instead of letting everyone retreat to their own corners or rooms, occupied by their phones or tablets, make this time count! Suggest a group board game or puzzle, watch a new or classic holiday movie together then discuss it, or try out a new recipe or Pinterest project. Whatever you do, think through options in advance so you don't default to solitary tech time.

Add a holiday addendum to your family technology plan. Many experts suggest creating a family technology plan to document rules/parameters around technology use—ideally one all household members abide by (resources [here](#) and [here](#)). However, the holidays might provide an opportunity for some changes to such a plan. Parents don't need to work online as often and kids enjoy a break—hopefully with less homework—from school. Families don't need their devices to function! Try spending a whole day device-free: Go to the movies, ice skating, a museum, out to dinner—leaving phones behind. Some of these carefree days offer times this is possible. After some initial griping, most will enjoy the temporary break and resulting conversations.

Stash devices in a designated spot. Keep all devices in a central charging station or find a “home” for them—preferably somewhere away from gathering spots, such as the kitchen or living room. Ideally, families can use this device hub year-round, but holidays make a great time to start. Phones and tablets “out of sight, out of mind”—and out of hearing range from every incoming notification—reduces the pull to constantly, mindlessly check them.

Host a tech-free gathering, with advance notice of expectations. If you host a large family meal that you want to keep tech-free—particularly if this involves people who don't live with you—make your tech expectations clear up front. Don't limit this idea to holiday dinners. Consider hosting a tech-free holiday party for the neighborhood or friends. Tech-free events are getting more popular, and people are willing to part with devices. Some restaurants and concert/comedy venues now take this approach. Notice how much more time you spend engaged in interesting conversations. If you want to capture the moment, take pictures at the beginning or end of the gathering—or use a Polaroid camera, which is making a comeback.

Be realistic, especially with older kids. A dinner is one thing, but a full week without mobile devices might be ambitious, especially for older kids—many of whom rely on social media sites to interact with

friends. Try to set realistic expectations and rules. The goal involves building together time, not delivering punishment. Suggest activities to connect and communicate as alternatives.

Incorporate technology in meaningful ways. Use technology in ways to foster, rather than hinder, connections. Grandparents live far away? Use Facetime or Skype to allow them to join in as kids open presents on Christmas morning or while lighting the menorah or kinara. Or go through online photos from the past year and create a photo book or a calendar together. Talk about the events, people and places in the photos.

Gift technology mindfully—with some strings attached. Kids of all ages often include tech devices on holiday wish lists. If you plan to give the gift of technology, make a point to set some ground rules at the time of gifting. Use the gift as an opportunity to talk about a family technology plan, your expectations around tech use, and using tech safely. It's also a great time to talk about some larger, overarching tech values—such as prioritizing “real-world” connections over technology.

Use tech to limit tech use. Apple now offers a series of features designed to help people manage their tech time. Screen Time, for example, analyzes time spent online, and enhancements to Do Not Disturb and additional options to control notifications make it easier to enjoy time periods without constant alerts. Android devices also offer similar features, and numerous apps designed for reduce screen time are available. Try challenging the entire family to see who can get the lowest screen time numbers for a week, or who can cut the most from weekly times over the course of a month.

Start the new year off right. Consider a family-wide New Year's resolution around technology use. Make a written commitment. You're in this together!

Want more tips and information about embracing healthy use of technology—and prioritizing interpersonal connection and communication in the age of technology? Visit ASHA's www.communicationandtech.org to learn more.

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