TOOLKIT:
Fostering Healthy Digital Habits

Families Together in New York State

A guide for families.

Community Engagement for Equity & Inclusion Department

1. Screen Time in Family Life

Screens are part of everyday family life. Used with purpose, they can support learning and creativity. When mostly passive, they can crowd out sleep, family time, and calming routines.

Passive screen time is low-engagement scrolling, autoplay videos, and long periods of watching without much interaction. This type of use can increase irritability, anxiety, and comparison-based stress.

Active screen time is more creative, social, or hands-on. It includes coding, drawing, researching, co-playing games, video calls, or learning something new.

The key idea: How children use screens matters more than **how long** they use them. The purpose, timing, and emotional impact make the most significant difference.

2. Healthy Use by Age

Children at different ages need different types of support.

Ages 5 to 8: Simple, shared, and structured use. Make sure to keep it creative and predictable.

Ages 9 to 12: Teach balance and boundaries. Introduce online safety in appropriate ways.

Ages 13+ : Screens become social worlds. Model healthy habits and talk openly about comparison, peer pressure, identity, and mental health.

A helpful question for any age:

“How does my child feel after using this type of screen time?

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3. The 5 C's Framework for Healthy Digital Habits

These help families shape screen habits without power struggles.

1. **CHILD**
   Know your child's temperament, development, sensory needs, and triggers.

2. **CONTENT**
   Choose material that is age-appropriate, healthy, and aligned with your family's values.

3. **CALM**
   Support calming routines away from screens — sleep, movement, fresh air, and predictable breaks.

4. **CROWDING OUT**
   Notice when screens start replacing what matters most: meals, homework, rest, play, or family time.

5. **COMMUNICATION**
   Use open, curious conversations about what your child is doing online. Curiosity builds cooperation more than rules alone.

4. Mental Health, Safety, Support Gaming & Social Media

Social media can provide connection, creativity, socializing through shared interests. But it involves safety risks like cyber-bullying, privacy concerns, addiction, impacting mental wellness.

Focus on how your child feels after using certain apps or platforms.Online Safety

- **Keep online safety conversations frequent, simple, and calm.**
- **Look for changes in mood, more secrecy, new unknown online friends, or withdrawal.**
- **Encourage children to come to a trusted adult whenever something online feels uncomfortable or confusing.**

Gaming

- **Healthy skill building based gaming can support social skills, teamwork, and focus. But there are challenges.**
- **Late-night use, overstimulation, difficulty stopping.**
- **Use visual timers, co-playing, predictable breaks, and gentle transitions.**

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5. Practical Family Scripts for Digital Balance

Use a calm, supportive tone to keep digital conversations open.

When you notice long scrolling
- "I can see you're really into this. Let's make sure it still fits with sleep and family time."

During transitions
- "Finish what you're doing and let's take a break. How much time do you need?"

Showing interest
- "What do you like most about this? Maybe we can find a creative or social way to build on it."

When logging off is hard
- "It's tough to stop something fun. How can we make this easier — maybe a five-minute warning or a timer?"

Talking about healthy habits
- "Screens can be great. Let's use them in ways that help your mind and body feel good."

6. Simple Reflection Exercise

Choose one small digital habit to try this week:

- A screen-free meal
- Co-viewing something together
- A calmer bedtime routine
- One creative or learning-based screen activity

Notice the shift in mood, connection, or the home atmosphere.

Small steps create meaningful change.

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7. Resources for Families

Below are trusted, free resources that support learning, creativity, mental health, and online safety.

Learning and Creativity

National Geographic Kids:
www.natgeokids.com/uk/parents/screen-time-for-kids/
NASA Kids Club:
www.nasa.gov/learning-resources/nasa-kids-club/
Kids Think Design:
www.kidsthinkdesign.org/index.html
PBS Kids Design Squad:
www.pbskids.org/designsquad/
Wonderopolis:
www.wonderopolis.org/what-are-you-wondering
Drawabox:
www.drawabox.com/
Udemy Art Classes for Kids:
www.code.org/en-US/about

Mental Health and Wellbeing

On Our Sleeves:
www.onoursleeves.org
JED Foundation:
www.jedfoundation.org
Inspire My Kids:
www. inspiremykids.com/great-quotes-for-kids-about-passion-and-enthusiasm/

7. Resources for Families continued

Online Safety and Cyberbullying

StopBullying.gov:
www.stopbullying.gov
Cyberbullying Research Center:
www.cyberbullying.org
National Children's Alliance:
www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/cyberbullying/
CyberTipline:
www.report.cybertip.org
DHS Know2Protect:
www.dhs.gov/know2protect/take-action
New York State Police, Internet:
www.troopers.ny.gov/internet-crimes-against-children
NYS OCFS Online Safety:
www.ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/online-safety/resources-youth.php:
NYS Department of Education. Digital Citizenship:
www.nysed.gov/edtech/digital-citizenship