

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Social Media, Screen Time, and Emotions
During COVID



PRESENTED BY

#HALF THE STORY

 **nami**
National Alliance on Mental Illness
New York City Metro

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#HALFTHESTORY

#HalfTheStory's mission is to empower the next generation's relationship with social media, through advocacy, education, and providing access to resources for youth.

We believe in digital wellbeing.

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DIGITAL WELLNESS...

If you're struggling to manage your child's screen time during this unprecedented time, you're not alone. With notifications going off at every hour and news feeds bombarding our heads, it can feel draining and impossible to strike the digital balance while playing the role of caregiver, teacher, and employee.

We're here to help.

First, let's acknowledge the realities of screen time during COVID-19 and remove all screen guilt. The purpose of this guide is to help shift your perspective on digital wellbeing during the pandemic and arm you with the tools to build a healthy digital diet. It begins with a shift in perspective to understand the ways that technology can support us, rather than hurt us during this time.



In the Era of COVID-19

How Much Is Too Much?

Research has identified both benefits and concerns regarding mental health and social media use. Young people are spending up to 7 hours a day on the platforms, which means approximately 5 years of their life will be spent behind the screen.

There is no golden number when it comes to screen time, but there are healthy standards.

For children younger than 18 months, avoid use of screen media other than video-chatting.

For 2-4 year olds, try to limit screen use to 1 hour per day. If timing allows, co-view media with your children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.

For everyone else, 2-3 hours is recommended. During this period where we have more time than ever, it's important to not focus on screen time at face value, but rather in terms of how screen time might be an opportunity cost. In other words, what are the things that you're missing out on that are more valuable than gluing your face to a screen?



Why Screen Time is like Nutrition

As described below, a nutrition metaphor is one good way to think through the costs and benefits of screen time.

Relationships with technology are in many ways, like relationships with food. They are complex, learned, and different for each individual. There are healthy foods and junk foods. Similarly, there are healthy, active ways to use technology and passive, “junk” ways to use technology. With intentional technology use, we can leave the experience feeling fuller, more connected, and enlightened. Like anything in life, digital wellness is finding a balance that works for you, serves your emotional health, and allows you to feel more connected and intentional through your devices.

One of the most valuable lessons you can teach your children is to set an intention for purposeful engagement.

It starts with one simple question: Why am I going on technology right now? There can be a number of reasons, ranging from boredom, loneliness, or the desire to win a TIKTOK challenge. ‘Why?’ gets to the root of the desire. We’ve outlined below a simple chart to help understand the difference between healthy and junky consumption. It’s easier to consume than to connect.

	Healthy	Junkfood
Action	ACTIVE ex. writing a song, coding, journaling, meditating	PASSIVE: ex. Endless scrolling or Excessive binge watching
Intention	YES ex. creation & learning	NONE
How You Feel	FULL, HAPPY, CREATIVE	EMPTY, DISTRACTED



Healthy Family Habits to Implement During COVID-19



Family Media Agreement: Family media standards help foster open dialogue between you and your child to set collaborative and realistic goals. Build accountability and set family targets to reward behavior and form healthy habits. (We’ve included a template for this on page 14)

Media Free Meals: Most families are spending more time together than ever before. It can be challenging to incorporate space for meaningful connection. Instate a phone-free meal rule for all family members. Make a pile of the phones in the middle of the table upside down. The first family member to grab their phone is on dish duty!

Designate a Phone-Free Space: With the inability to spend time with friends and family IRL it’s easy to resort to scrolling as a distraction. Create a designated phone free space in the house with activities like yoga, puzzles, juggling, painting, or letter writing.

Mindful Technology: Incorporate apps to help build healthy behaviors like [Personal Zen](#) to manage stress. Personal Zen is Dr. Tracy’s App, built by a team of leading scientists and mobile developers. It retrains your brain to lower stress and anxiety.

Incorporate Off-Line Activities: During “downtime” consider incorporating family activities like board games, puzzles, and juggling to engage your children.

Designate Tech-Free Walks: If your current environment allows you to take a social distance walk, encourage your family to walk together and leave all technology behind. By leaving the phone at home you can make space for conscious conversation and bonding.

Research has identified both benefits and concerns regarding mental health and social media use.

Screen Time Journal: In order to develop a healthy digital diet, it’s imperative to help your children set goals and record their screen time on a daily basis to identify active versus passive consumption. (We’ve included a template for this on page 16)

Practice What You Preach!: Your children will mirror your behavior. Be mindful of your consumption habits as they will follow in your footsteps.

Follow Accounts that Inspire & Educate: During COVID-19, it’s important to monitor who you are following and how you engage. [@HalfTheStory](#) is offering daily tips for healthier digital habits during this time.

Put Your Phones to Bed: Social media and the news can be anxiety inducing right now for many. It’s imperative to go to bed with a clear head. Instate a family rule to “put your phones to rest” at least 30 minutes before bedtime.

De-Escalating Digital Drama

In the wake of an international pandemic like COVID-19, limiting media exposure, avoiding fake news, and consuming information from trusted sources is imperative.

63% of kids say that the news makes them feel afraid, angry, and/or sad or depressed (Common Sense Media, 2017). The global epidemic of misinformation is spreading faster than the actual pandemic, posing serious problems for mental health. During the crisis, it's important to set standards and de-escalate digital distress. Here are a few steps for prevention:

IDENTIFY: Socialize trustworthy news sources with your family.

CREATE BOUNDARIES: Set limits surrounding media exposure. **We suggest removing notifications from your phones** during COVID-19 to avoid constant stimulation from the news. Set designated times for social media check-ins and “news free” weekends.

INFORM: Open dialogue surrounding new safety updates or protocols.

Social Media Monitoring

As a parent, it can be challenging to manage and monitor every platform, especially during COVID-19. Reading every text, email, and photo isn't realistic. If you're looking for an efficient solution, we suggest a platform that monitors text messaging, YouTube, email, and social media, all in one dashboard. There are a number of companies out there that can help bring you peace of mind including Bark, Norton Family Premier, and Mamabear.



RESOURCES

We have curated a list of resource to help make digital wellness more accessible.

Digital Wellbeing Resources

Apps to Promote Positive Behavior:

- **Jour**
Your guided journal for a calmer, happier, and more mindful life.
- **DIY.Org Creative Challenges**
DIY.ORG is an impressive collection of fun how-to videos that encourage kids to learn cooking, photography, sewing, and more.
- **Virtual Hope Box**
Virtual Hope Box is called a “therapy companion” and contains simple coping tools to support oneself, especially in times of need.

Apps to Promote Conscious Conversations:

- **Family Chat**
Family Chat is designed with families, kids, and parents in mind and presents interesting questions appropriate for children of all ages.
- **Beyond Small Talk: Insight**
Built by a psychology professor, Beyond Small Talk helps spark meaningful conversations between people.
- **What Would You Choose? Rather**
In What Would You Choose?, you’re presented with two difficult scenarios to choose from.

Apps to Promote Mindfulness:

- **Dreamy Kid Meditation**
One of the few meditation apps geared towards kids, Dreamy Kid Meditation is a collection of guided meditations designed for children and teens of all ages.
- **Aura**
Whether you have an hour or just a few minutes, Aura’s hundreds of meditations help you easily keep your mental wellbeing in check.
- **Calm**
A one-stop-shop for meditations, calming music, and movement guides, Calm helps you reduce stress, sleep better, and stay focused.
- **Headspace for Kids**
A Headspace subscription includes access to its kid’s exercises and activities to help both kids and parents build mindfulness at a young age.
- **Prezence**
Nurture your relationship to yourself, others, and technology with thoughtful meditations.

Digital Wellbeing Resources pt. 2

Apps to Promote Movement:

- **Sworkit Kids**
Sworkit has specially-designed kids workout that help boost agility to strength to flexibility.
- **GoNoodle Kids**
GoNoodle gets kids moving with fun dance, yoga, and exercise videos developed by educators and child development specialists.
- **Just Dance Now**
Just Dance Now brings video-game dances off the console and into a smartphone, allowing anyone to get moving to choreographed dance with just a smartphone.

Apps to Help Monitor Screentime:

- **Freedom**
Freedom allows you to block any distracting apps off your phone and computer- think no social media, shopping, news, or videos.
- **Moment**
Moment tracks the hours spent on your phone and provides you with tools to curb time spent through guided coaching and the ability to establish screen-free time.
- **Social Fever**
Social Fever records how long you use your phone and notifies you when you go over your personal limits.
- **RealizD**
RealizD has impressive array of controls, alerts, graphics, insights and stats to help you understand your phone usage.
- **OFFTIME**
OFFTIME blocks phone, computer, and other device functions on a recurring schedule, helping you live a more phone-free lifestyle.

Apps to Promote Mental Health:

- **Personal Zen**
Personal Zen makes it easy to reduce stress and anxiety through short games.
- **Woebot**
Woebot is an AI powered chat-bot that helps guide users through everyday stressors by providing tools, skills, and strategies for coping - all through instant messaging!
- **MoodMission**
An app that gives the user 5 options, based on how you are feeling in the current moment, as to how to best alleviate those feelings of anxiety or depression.
- **Happily**
Happily incorporates positive psychology, CBT, and mindfulness in various activities that promote overall well-being and happiness.
- **SuperBetter**
A video-game inspired app, SuperBetter helps individuals build and maintain resilience by completing tasks and “quests.”
- **AnxietyCoach**
Created by Mayo Clinic, this app allows users to become more educated on specific disorders and their treatments, track symptoms over time, and helps to create a list of fears that can be conquered over time.

Family Mental Health Resources

HOTLINES:

CRISIS TEXT LINE:
Text HOME to 741741

TEEN LINE:
Text TEEN to 839863

VIRTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS

NYC Startup My Wellbeing is Offering *"Pay What You Can"* grounding groups.

[NAMI LOS ANGELES](#) and [NAMI NYC](#) are offering "Virtual Support Groups"

PARENT RESOURCES

- ***The Mighty on Mental Health:***
A digital health community of real people sharing their real stories. During this social distancing period, The Mighty is releasing a weekly schedule of virtual events they are holding on Facebook Live - everything from meditations and movements, to activities for children and fireside chats.
- ***The Child Mind Institute:***
This nonprofit organization is offering Facebook Live discussions with expert clinicians every day. The Child Mind Institute is also providing a daily tip for parents navigating COVID-19 with children. It outlines what the tip is, the value of it, and how to go about it.
- ***Mindspace:***
Mindspace is a Psychology Clinic that is based in Quebec that is offering virtual support groups for parents.

EXERCISES

On the following pages you will find interactive exercises to help foster healthy social media habits.

Family Media Agreement

Description:

Safe technology during the COVID-19 pandemic needs to be taught, especially as the lines between school, social lives, and entertainment have been blurred due to a complete shift to technology. With constant inundation of news, social media challenges, and more it's important to set boundaries to limit screen time.

Family media contracts help foster open dialogue between you and your child to set collaborative goals.

Time Limits:

- I will be allowed to use for a maximum of ____ hours a day on week nights outside of school work.
- I will be allowed to use a maximum of , ____ hours a day on weekends.
- I will not use past , ____ o'clock.
- I will not read the news more than ____ hours a week.

Content During COVID:

- _____ that I am not allowed to access include:
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
- I will not make light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- I will not participate in any harmful or offensive challenges on Tiktok that will put me or others at risk.
- I will not be hurtful or mean to others on social media. This includes messaging, commenting, posting and liking mean or hateful content.

Family Media Agreement

Privacy:

- I will not give away any personal information such as my full name, date of birth, address, phone number or photos.
- I will not share my passwords with anyone besides my family.
- I will report any unsafe activity or bullying that I experience.
- I will not share my location.
- I will allow my parents to adjust the privacy settings on my devices and monitor my technology use.
- I will not share any content that is too revealing. This includes posting or sending inappropriate photos or messages.

Consequences:

- I understand that access to this device is a privilege and breaking this agreement will lead to the following:
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
- If I am cyberbullied, I will be open and honest with my parents and tell them about the issue.

Parent Signature Date
Your Signature Date

Screen Time Journal

Description:

In order to develop a healthy digital diet, it's imperative to help your children set goals and evaluate their intention for using technology. Throughout repetition, this will become part of their framework and help foster lifelong digital hygiene.

Instructions:

- At the beginning of each week, set a screen time goal for the week ahead based on the previous week's usage. Host a discussion to explore how technology affected their experiences during COVID-19. This is a natural way to foster dialogue about emotions during a challenging time and understand their core needs.
- Encourage your child to track their daily usage and fill out the chart below.
- Repetition is key!
- *Bonus:* Set family goals and reward children who have achieved their goals with offline incentives.

Key:

- **Time Spent:** How much time was spent behind the screen?
- **Activity:** What activity were you engaging with? (Streaming, Social Media, Social (Facetime))
- **Purpose:** Why did you choose to go online? Boredom? Seeking connection?
- **How did it make you feel?** See the emotions spectrum below.
- **Junk or Healthy?** Classify this as active/healthy or passive/junk consumption

				
Happy/ Cheerful/ Calm	Frustrated/ Worried/Anxious	Mad / Angry / Lost Control	Sad/ Unwell/ Down	Bored/ Tired/ Sleepy

Discussion Guide for Evaluation:

1. **Open With Emotion:** Begin the conversation by asking your children how they feel. During an emotionally exhausting time, it's crucial to make space for open dialogue.
2. **Calculate Screen Time:** Review each child's screen time map from the previous week. Work with them to total their total screen time from the previous week.
3. **Understand Underlying Needs:** Instead of looking at the screen time as the only metric, move to help your child understand the primary intention of their screen time. Was it driven by boredom or loneliness? Open this is a dialogue for your children and help them draw conclusions for the way they felt after exploring their phones based on their primary intention. *For example-- Did your child feel sad more often when they used their phone during boredom?*
4. **Draw Conclusions:** Help your child draw conclusions. Was most of the time spent on media a week healthy or junk consumption?
5. **Take Small Steps:** This is a challenging time to navigate digital wellness, as it might be the only way you access free time and for your children to feel connected to their friends. Instead of expecting large changes and "cutting back", introduce new rituals and routines to help your children feel better and in turn reduce their screen time.

Screen Time Journal

Week 1	Time spent	Activity	Purpose	How did it make you feel?	Junk or Healthy?
Monday				    	
				    	
				    	
Tuesday				    	
				    	
				    	
Wednesday				    	
				    	
				    	
Thursday				    	
				    	
				    	
Friday				    	
				    	
				    	
Total Screentime					
Screentime Goal					