Max Stossel - Center for Humane Technology

Tools & Reminders For Parents



This document is meant as a follow up to the talk “Education In The Age Of Distraction”

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At the Center for Humane Technology we're working to change how technologists build their products…



Thought Leadership

At the highest levels across the world, we introduce concepts and language to express problems and solutions in ways that help set a global agenda. We give stakeholders the tools to have meaningful conversations that lead to change.



Inspiration

We drive adoption of Humane Technology through design working groups, cataloging best practices, and elevating exemplary Humane Tech products. We also advise tech leaders as opportunities arise.



External Pressure

We use media, policy campaigns, and shareholder activation to create "surround sound" environments; within tech companies, at dinner tables, in newsrooms, at schools, and in the halls of government — that set the conditions for lasting change.



Internal Pressure

We mobilize influential technologists to advocate for Humane Technology within their companies, helping them speak up, drive change, and find support from similarly concerned peers.

In the meantime, this document provides some tactics for today's world that people have found helpful.

Our Approach to Education:

1. Provide resources on upgrading our HUMANNESS to defend against manipulative tech (coming soon)

2. Develop & share tactics that are having positive results for students, parents and teachers (in this doc)

In The Home

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Lead by example

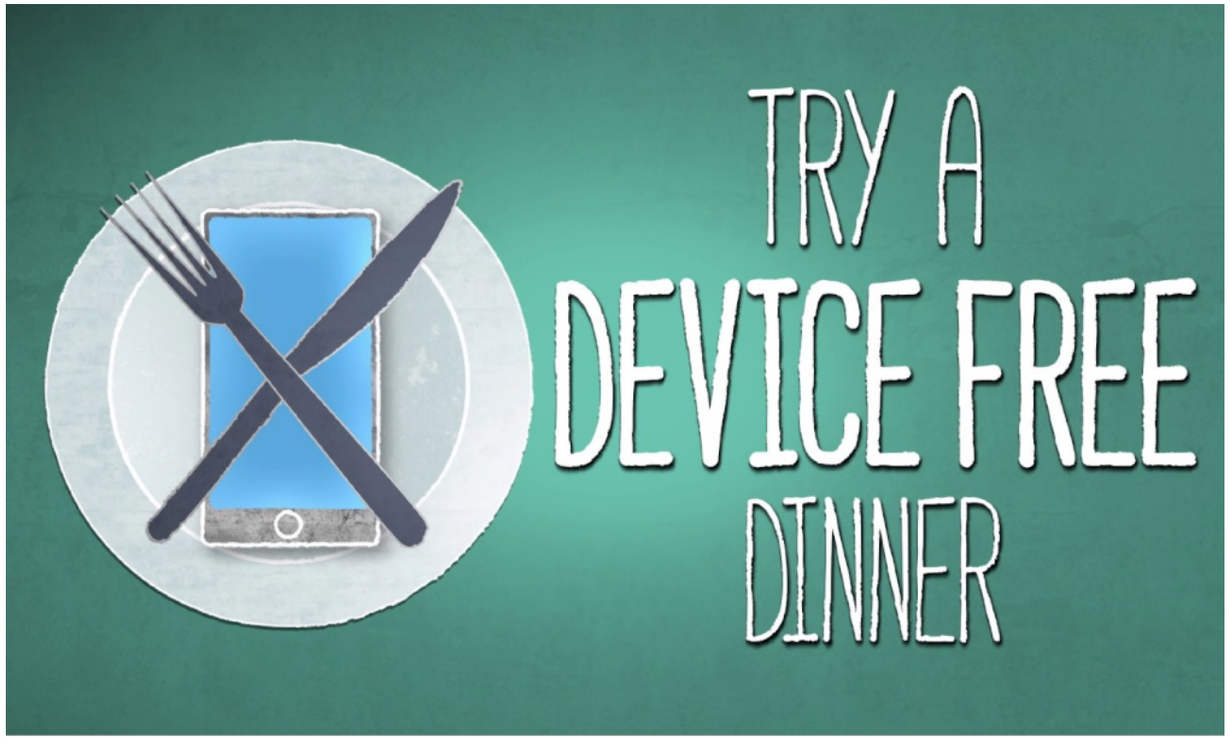
This is probably most important of all!

Remember your children learn from you in and outside of the house. Show that eye contact and sustained attention are more important than responding to a buzz.

Make it the rare exception to ignore someone in your presence, and communicate what purpose you're using the device for when you do reach for it/use it in front of your child.

This can be challenging as we struggle with our relationship with technology, so when you make mistakes, discuss them.

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Phone-Free Zones

Setting zones in your home like the dinner table or the bedroom where no one (parents or kids) are allowed to use the devices can be a helpful tool.

Helps facilitate conversation and children tend to be more accepting of this when parents are held to the same standard.

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Physical alarm clock

Charge your device outside the bedroom.

Get a separate alarm clock in your bedroom, and charge your phone in another room (or on the other side of the room). This way, you can wake up without getting sucked into your phone before you even get out of bed.

This allows you to wake up and think your own thoughts as well as prevents you from immediately introducing stress and anxiety into your day.

If you have your bedroom as a device free zone, this can do WONDERS for quality of sleep. (Blue light before bed messes with our sleep)

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Blue light & sleep

Research shows that blue light (which is emitted from most screens) negatively impacts our quality of sleep.

Some have reported its helpful to wind down with no screen time for at least an hour before going to sleep.

Features like Nightshift and extensions like F.lux help reduce the amount of harmful light from our screens, but from talking to people who have tried both, the screenless wind down seems more effective.

F.lux can be downloaded by clicking the above link, and there are two ways to turn Night Shift on and off:

Open Control Center. Firmly press the Brightness control icon, then tap to turn Night Shift on or off.

1. Go to Settings > Display & Brightness > Night Shift. 2 On the same screen, you can schedule a time for Night Shift to turn on automatically and adjust color temperature.

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Include your kids in the rule-making process:

“I notice how much time you’re spending on screens and it concerns me. Can we talk about that?”

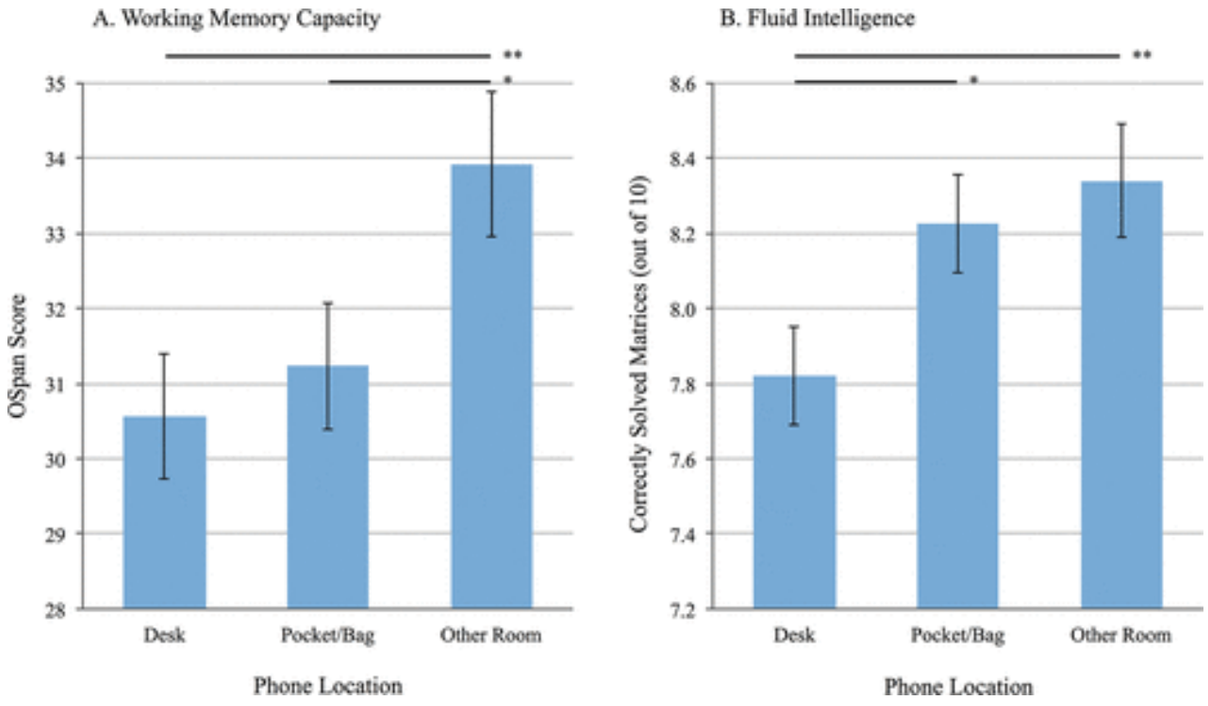
Talking to your kids about your reasoning and theirs, and making decisions with them, as opposed to for them, can help them trust your guidance.

Work to understand the underlying needs and associated triggers driving them to digital distraction, and brainstorm solutions that may or may not involve screens.

Working with them is not the same as caving to their every whim :)

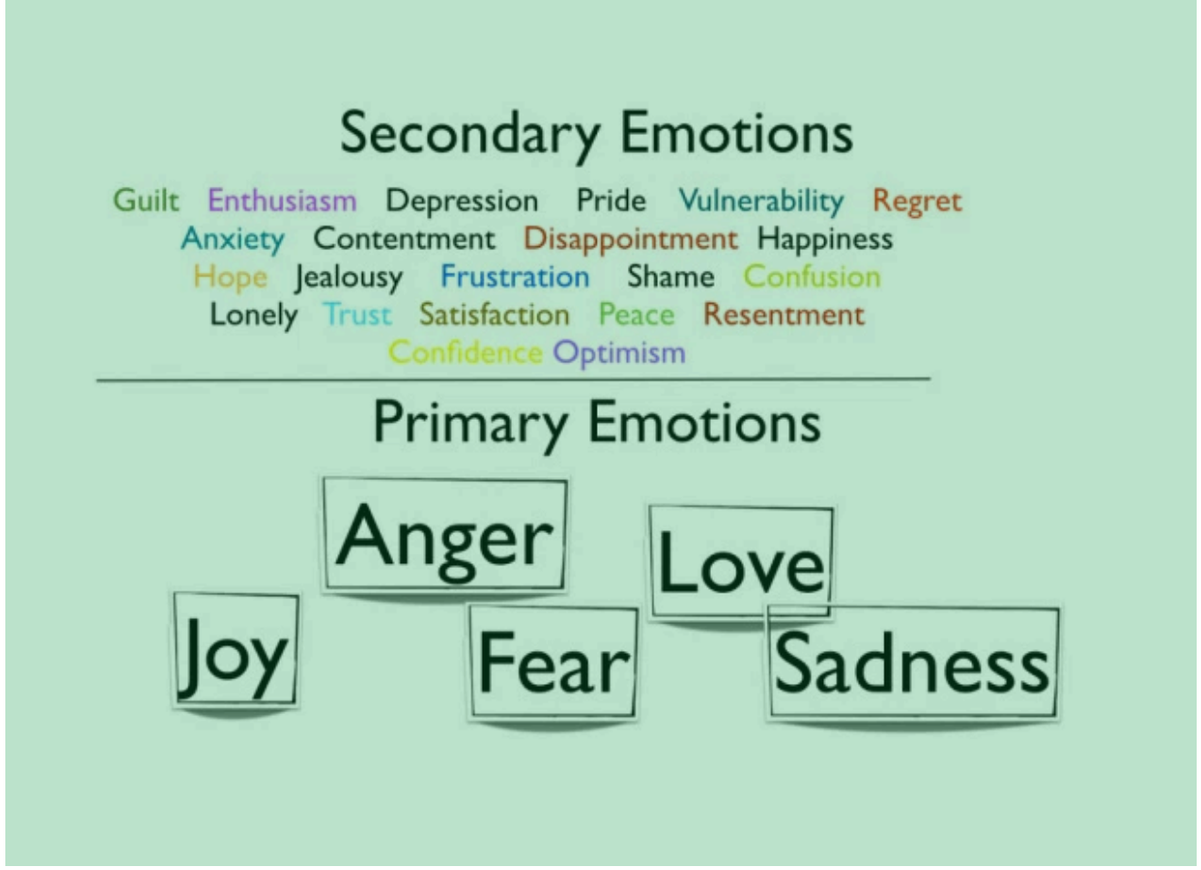
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Study & focus with your phone outside the room



“Although these devices have immense potential to improve welfare, their persistent presence may come at a cognitive cost. In this research, we test the “brain drain” hypothesis that the mere presence of one’s own smartphone may occupy limited-capacity cognitive resources, thereby leaving fewer resources available for other tasks and undercutting cognitive performance. Results from two experiments indicate that even when people are successful at maintaining sustained attention—as when avoiding the temptation to check their phones—the mere presence of these devices reduces available cognitive capacity. Moreover, these cognitive costs are highest for those highest in smartphone dependence.” - Ward et al. 2017

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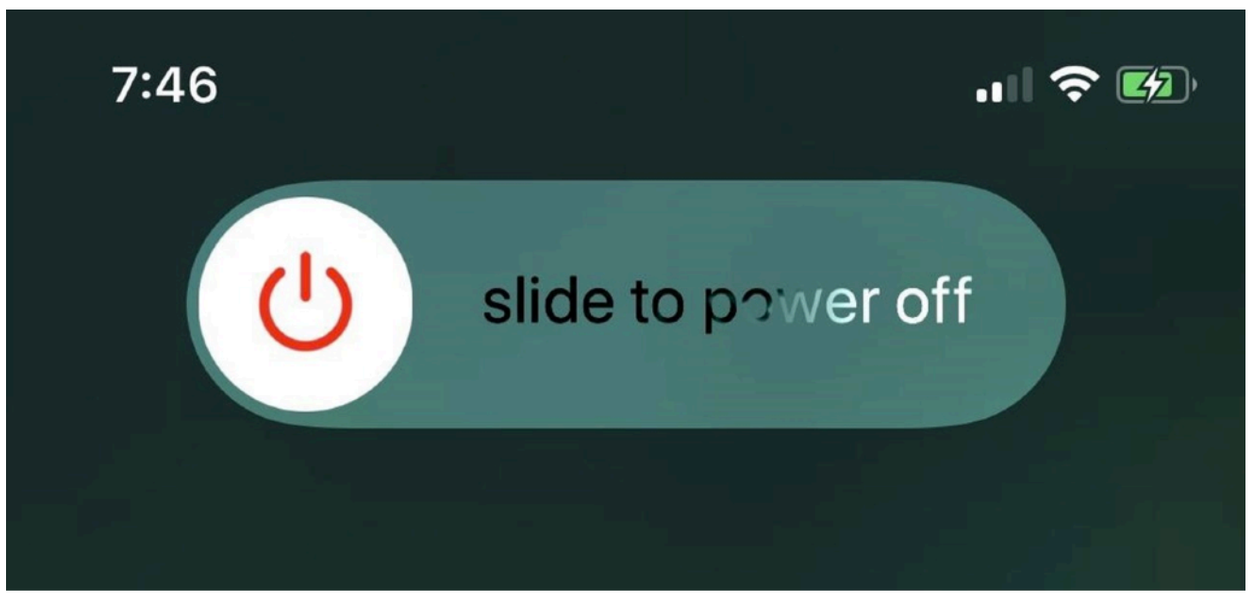
Ask the right questions

Instead of asking “Do you like that game/app?”

Ask: “How does that game/app make you feel?”

This allows us to separate the focus from how much time we’re spending on something vs. how it impacts us on a human level

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Digital sabbath

This is a practice most helpful to do as a family, and ideal if you can get your children's friends families to participate as well.

Have activities planned and check in on how you're feeling pre and post this sabbath.

Adults who stick to this seem to truly love its impact.



Spending Time Differently

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The Empty Glass

“Based on the latest research, I recommend that children, teens and their parents sit down together and actively approach their 24 hour day as valuable time to be used in ways that support a healthy lifestyle.

Thinking of their day as an empty glass, they should fill it with the essentials; enough sleep to grow and avoid getting sick, school, time to spend outdoors, play, socialize, do homework, and to sit down for one meal a day together as a family (perhaps the single most protective thing you can do to keep their bodies and minds healthy). Once these activities are totaled, remaining time can be used for other experiences that interest the child, such as the activity in question (Minecraft, Fortnite etc.)”

- Michael Rich, The Mediatrician, Harvard University

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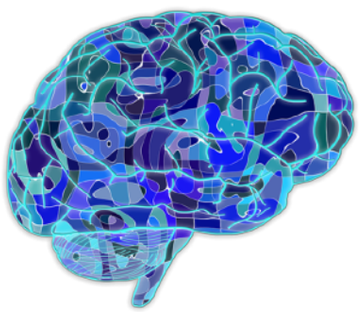
Schedule real world free play

Be sure to schedule free play time to give the alternative to digital connections. There's no substitute for in-person interactions and relationship development to forge lasting social skills and a sense of relatedness.

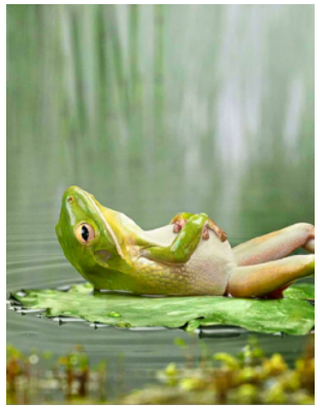
“Learning to get along and cooperate with others as equals may be the most crucial evolutionary function of human social play” - Dr. Peter Gray, PHD. Boston College

Gaming Habit Replacement

If trying to replace gaming behavior, think across multiple categories. Very little engages so many different aspects of teen life as gaming which is extremely stimulating, often a teen's resting habit and often takes up a significant portion of social time.



Mentally Engaging — learning a new language, learning a new instrument, computer programming, starting an online business, graphic design, music production, photography.



Resting — physical reading, podcasts, drawing



Social — martial arts, rock climbing,

Gaming Habit Replacement

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gamequitters.com is a powerful resource *if and only if your child actually wants to game less. Their* Hobby Tool is a great resource for anyone looking for an answer to “What else am I supposed to do with my time?”

GAME QUITTERS

Take our Quiz | Programs | Real Stories | For Parents | Resources | Forum | Login

I want activities that help with

BEING ACTIVE | ACHIEVEMENT | RELAXING | BEING SOCIAL | MENTALLY ENGAGING | CREATIVITY

I want activities that are

FREE | LOW COST | AT HOME | OFFLINE | CAM'S FAVORITES | EASY TO START

Yoga

Combines stretching, breathing techniques, exercise, and meditation to improve your health and happiness.

Resources

Yoga Journal

Reddit Yoga

Weightlifting

Improve your health and reduce anxiety by working out. Great for beginners and people more advanced.

Resources

Body Building

Alexander Juan Antonio Cortes

Running

A great place to start exercising and getting outside. Perfect for all skill levels.

Resources

Reddit's Couch to 5K Community

Jared Quit Gaming and Ran Marathons

Reading

Learn more about yourself and the world while relaxing at home, in cafes, or outdoors.

Resources

5 Books to Read After You Quit Gaming

100 Good Books to Read by James Clear

Rock Climbing

Martial Arts

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common sense media®

What is Snapchat?
How does Snapchat work?
How old do you have to be to use Snapchat?
Do messages really disappear on Snapchat?
What are Snapstreaks?
What's Snap Map?
What's a Snapchat story?
What's a Snapcode?
What's Discover?
What are Snapchat's other features?
Is Snapchat safe for tweens and teens?
How do I monitor Snapchat and use the settings?

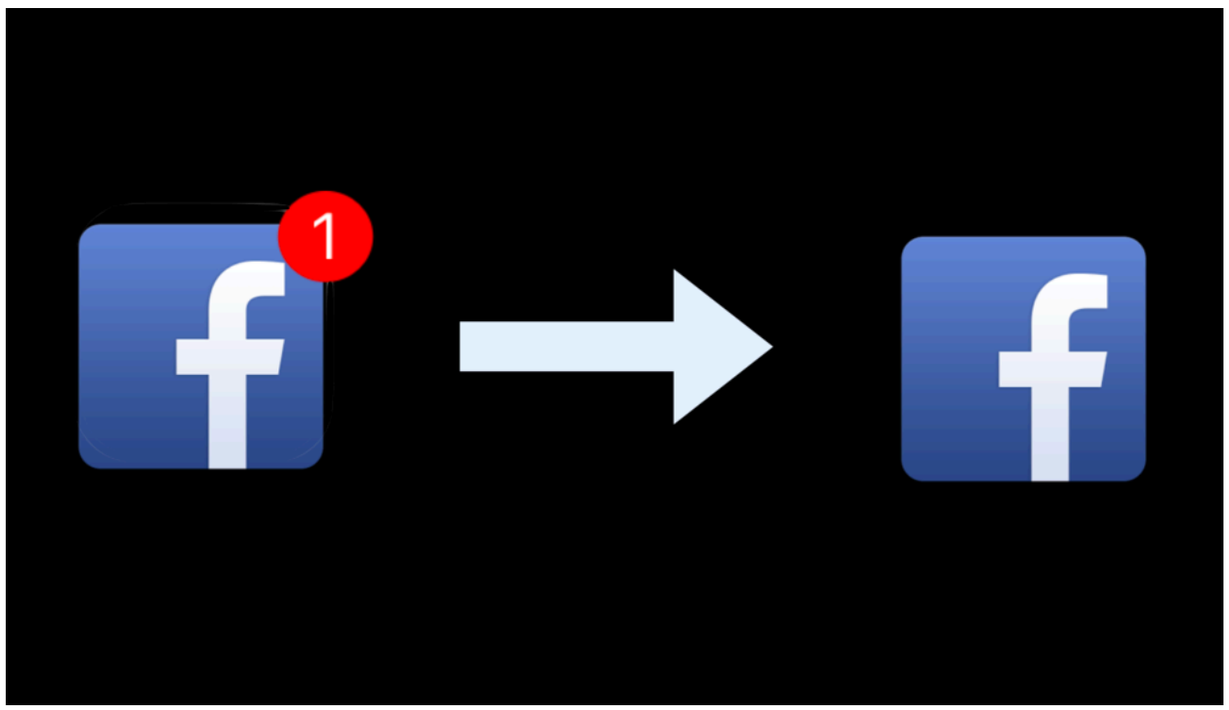
Common Sense Media

Common Sense Media is a partner of the Center for Humane Technology. I recommend them as a resource specifically for their explainers of specific apps your kids might be using and how-to's for setting controls on those apps. If you want to learn more about the apps/games/media your child is watching, they have lots of information breaking that down.

In Your Device Settings



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Turn off all notifications except from people.

Notifications appear in RED dots because red is a trigger color that instantly draws our attention. But most notifications are generated by machines, not actual people. They keep our phones vibrating to lure us back into apps we don't really need to be in.

Visit Settings > Notifications and turn off all notifications, banners, and badges, except from apps where real people want your attention; e.g. messaging apps like WhatsApp, FB Messenger, Signal, Telegram, WeChat etc.

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Greyscale

Colorful icons give our brains shiny rewards every time we unlock. Set your phone to grayscale to remove those positive reinforcements. It helps many people check their phone less. as well as creates a moment of Mindfullness. “Ugh this thing is grey… why did I pick it up again? Did I mean to?” Common for this effect to wears off after a few weeks.

Go to Settings > General > Accessibility > Accessibility Shortcut (bottom) > Color Filters. This allows you to quickly triple-tap the home button to toggle grayscale on and off, so you keep color when you need it.

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Screentime & Digital Wellbeing

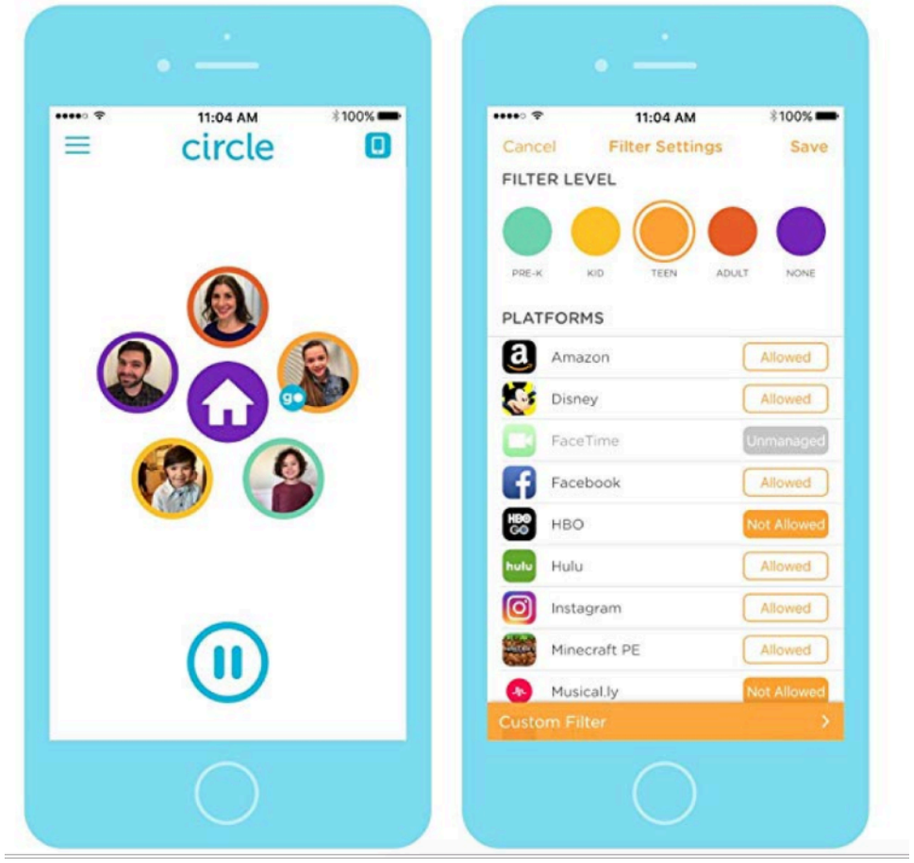
Apple's Screentime and Android's digital wellbeing features will help you and your family set limits on certain apps.

How to set up Screentime

How to set up Digital Wellbeing (No family option as of April 2019)

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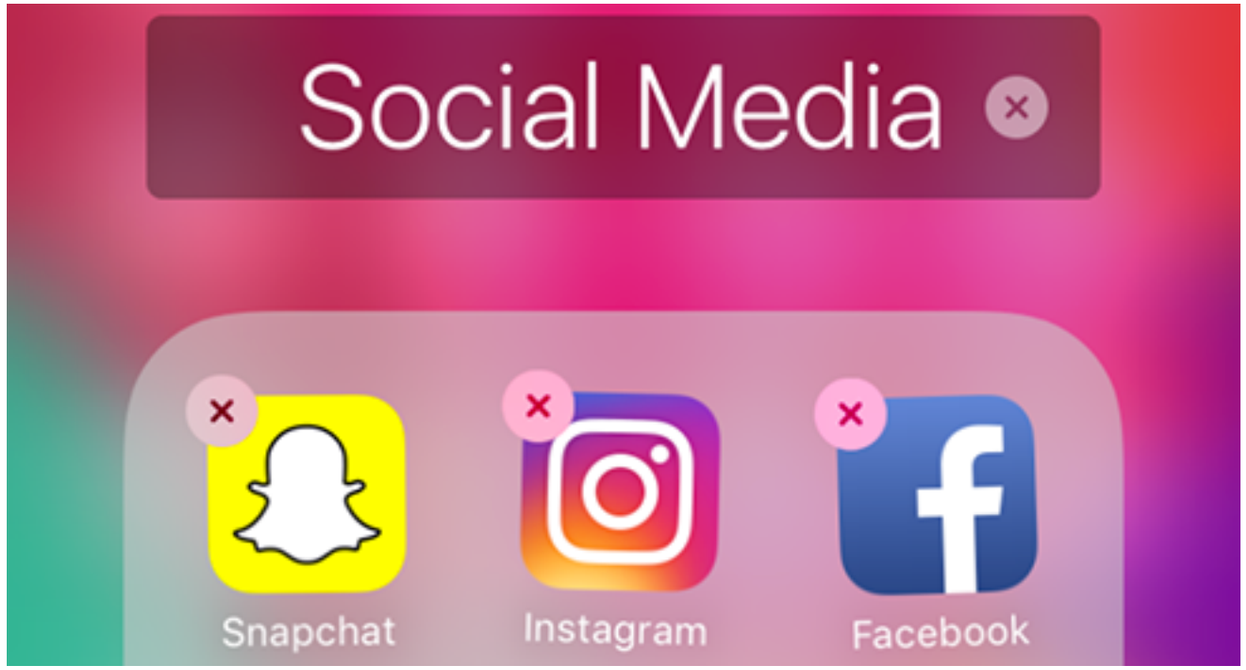




OurPact & Circle

At the end of each talk I ask parents “Is there anything you’re doing that’s working really well for you?” And OurPact and Circle are two products that come up frequently. If Screentime or Digital Wellbeing are not meeting your needs. In my skewed experience, these are the parental control tools to be rising to the top as tools for monitoring/blocking specific apps and setting limits.

Note: Others have complained that if you don’t sign up for the premium membership OurPact scrambles the order of apps on your child’s phone. And that Circle may slow down your wifi.





Go cold turkey

This one is tough, but effective! If you really want to use your phone less, we recommend removing all the major social media apps from your phone. It's the easiest way to cut back, as these apps can easily gobble up so much of our time. Train yourself to use them from your computer only (if at all).

Note: You can delete the Facebook app and still get some specific features, i.e. Facebook Messenger.

If it's not social media for you, what is that one app/ game that sucks you in the most but leaves you with regret? Delete that one!

*NOTE: This is **FAR** more effective for teenagers to do in groups. High likelihood of an unsatisfying outcome if they try and do this by themselves. It's also helpful to frame it as a challenge.*

"Try deleting it for a week and see how it feels."

"Do you really want to go your whole life without knowing what it feels like not having social media on your phone?"

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It’s never been easier to run from ourselves

Learning to sit with feelings, boredom, and the challenges that come with daily life is going to be a major challenge for the next generation.

SEL, Mindfulness and Communication, have become essential skills to navigate this digital world.

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Administrative recommendations



1. Integrate SEL, Mindfulness, & Communication Skills. These are important new categories in response to the digital world the next generation lives in.

2. Check and return phones at the door (with exceptions, i.e. vulnerable populations seeking online community and specific classes that have thoughtfully required them.)

3. Audit yourselves, is what you've implemented achieving what it was meant to?

4. Pay attention to what we're losing as we're gaining. Move slow and test before making sweeping implementations.

5. Approach tech in schools with a skeptical eye. Measure success not just in use, but in human results. Start from the assumption that new tech or ed tech won't improve the learning experience and work backwards from there.

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Contact: Max Stossel

Thank you for listening. I'd love to hear what's working and not working for you as you try these tools.

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Title: Head of Education, Center for Humane Technology

Your Feedback Informs Our Work:

If you'd like help with something not covered:

Please submit it here

If you'd like to suggest a resource/intervention that's worked well for you personally:

Please submit it here