



How to Really Prevent Screen Addiction

5 things parents can do before it's too late.

As parents, we all want what's best for our kids. That's why from the early moments of their lives, we love and protect them to the best of our ability. We put them in car seats, insist they wear helmets, and feed them nutritious food so they can grow strong.

So why do we treat their screen use differently?

Screen addiction is the new diagnosis that we would rather not associate with our kids, but it is the outcome of a failed screen experiment that many families are now experiencing.¹ The truth is, it is not hard to prevent screen overuse as long as you understand that prevention is much more than installing the perfect parental controls, having your teens to sign a well-worded screen use contract, or talking to them extensively. Boundaries and conversations are important, but they do not prevent screen problems or addiction.

It's time to rethink your screen plan, set new goals, and become ScreenStrong™.

1

Be the coach.

Rethink your role as a parent. Consider your position as a coach rather than a cool parent. Your job is to nurture your child's development through encouragement, discipline, security, and unconditional love. Go back to the fundamentals, do the research, and rework the game plan. You are stepping up as the coach that your team members need right now to get them refocused and moving in a healthy direction.

2

Hit the pause button.

Understanding a few basic facts about brain development is a must when preventing screen addictions. These facts set the stage for all of screen decisions and lead to an understanding that it is healthy to delay the use of entertainment screens until late adolescence.

Consider this:

- + The executive center of a child's brain takes about 25 years to be fully connected. This is why children need a coach. Your child needs to borrow your fully developed brain (your wisdom and common sense) while his is under construction.²
- + Attachment is a fundamental need for every person. Healthy attachment to caring adults is needed for healthy brain development. Detached kids have a hard time learning and self-regulating. When a child attaches to a screen, human relationships can suffer.³
- + Screens are not neutral. Screen use changes the structure and function of your child's brain. MRI studies show that heavy screen use prematurely thins the cortex in young brains. Even just two hours a day can lower cognitive and language scores.⁴

3

Set big goals.

Successful coaches set high standards. They raise the bar for their team and communicate goals often. Set big goals for your family (ie. "Screens are a tool not a toy," "We value time together over screen time,"

"We have a porn-free home"). Then discuss those goals with your kids and continue to talk about them through ongoing conversations. Discuss these expectations with extended family, your child's teachers, and friends' parents.

4

Focus on life skills.

Learning life skills takes a lot of practice and hard work. Generally, the more time your child spends in the digital world, the more uncomfortable he will be in the real world. It is a trade. Your job is to set him up to find joy, purpose, and success in the real world long enough to prevent him from screen addictions. So teach life skills and hobbies, like making school lunches, learning how to fish, cooking a family meal, mowing the lawn, and working on the car with Dad. Teach emotional intelligence skills, such as work ethic, teamwork, adaptability, empathy, time management, communication skills, and problem solving. None of these can be mastered on a screen.

5

Dare to be different.

Forge a new path and embrace delay. Our culture leads us to believe that smartphones and video games are a must-have for a normal childhood. But your gut feeling and medical science say the opposite. Take a stand for your child. Be the best coach for your kids and let them know that you have their back. Dare to be different. Dare to delay.

These five steps are the beginning to preventing screen addiction. To get a more complete understanding of how to become a ScreenStrong family, visit screenstrong.com.

screenstrong.com

1. World Health Organization. 2. *The Teenage Brain*, Dr. Frances E. Jensen 3. *The Collapse of Parenting*, Dr. Leonard Sax 4. National Institutes of Health, ABCD Study.