

REELING IN SOCIAL MEDIA



A resource guide for
Marin County Office of Education Parent Ed Series
Nov 2025



*Throughout this packet,
click on images or
underlined text to link!*

 **ScreenSense**
www.screensense.org

SOCIAL MEDIA: REELING IT IN

Concerned about how your child is using apps like Instagram, TikTok, Discord, and Snapchat? **It's never too late to make a change.**

Reeling in social media is a gradual process and how you approach the process depends on the age and individual traits of your child. **In elementary and middle school**, we encourage you to remove social media apps. **In high school**, set healthier boundaries, reduce harm, and help your teen reclaim time and attention for offline hobbies, passions, and connections. Here are key tips:

Tackle **1** issue or concern at a time.

Identify what is most problematic in terms of use and start there.

Lead by example.

Our kids are watching how WE use tech, especially social media.



Protect sleep as your top priority.

Remove devices from bedrooms overnight.

 **Establish device-free zones & times** at home to prioritize in real life activities and connection.

Set social media time limits (p.3).

If access to the app is limited, better uses of time will result.

Use social media safeguards (p.5-6).

Set up apps for privacy to help protect your child from harm.

Talk to your kids. Connection is key.

Know what they are doing online and with whom! Ask for a tour of their feed.
(See p. 7-8)

Build community.

It's much easier to roll back social media use with other families who are doing the same.



More details and info [here](#).



ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Here is a list of **ways to limit time on social media apps**. Mix and match and find what works to get your tween's or teen's social media use in check:

Basic Time limit - Set an overall screen time limit or time limit per app. Try **20 min/day for social media apps and YouTube**. They can always ask for more time!

Day of the week constraints - e.g., only on weekends, not Mon-Thur, only Sundays.

Time boxing - e.g., only accessible 5-7pm, only after dark, weekend mornings only.

IRL conditions (mandated must-do life nutrients) - For example, only if homework is done and you've exercised for an hour and you've read for 30 min and you've done chores and.... Also consider where (online vs offline) your tween or teen is fulfilling their basic needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence - are there additional ways to give more IRL independence, skill development, and socialization?

Contain it to certain devices - For example, remove social media from the device on which homework is done, remove from mobile phone, only allow on family device that stays at home, or only allow on device that stays in a common space.

Clarify device-free spaces/boundaries at home - For example, never in certain rooms (bedroom, bathroom), not during time with friends (hangouts, sleepovers, carpools), not while at school or studying, not during family time (like meals, car rides, vacation, special events). **Protect sleep!** Set a tech bedtime, install an alarm clock, charge all internet-enabled devices outside the bedroom, enable an overnight Downtime on Apple devices.

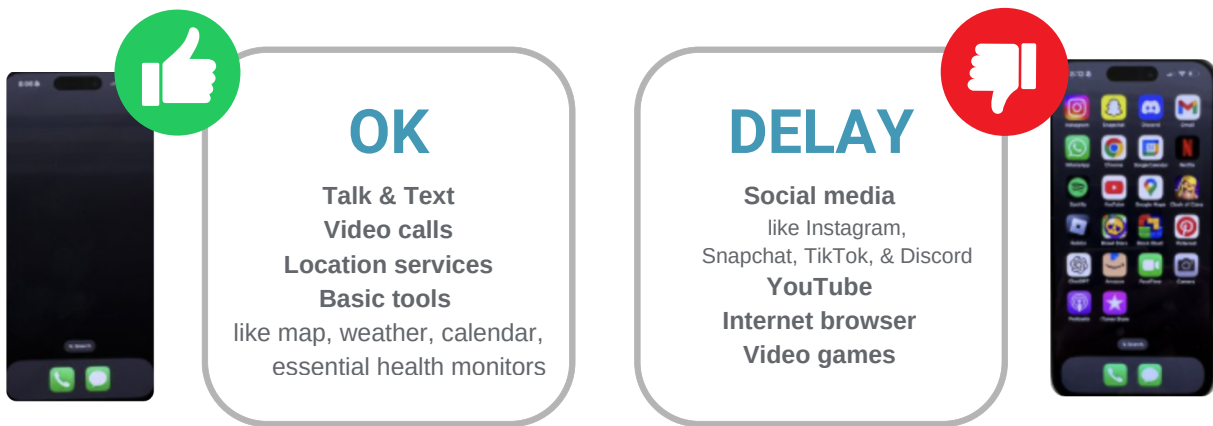
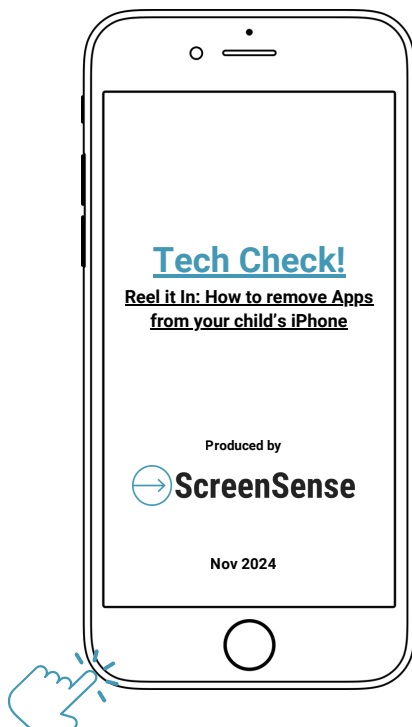
Remove stickiest/most problematic apps - For example, pick one to keep and delete the rest, delete all and start over after a break, experiment with a week or two without specific apps, redirect to other more productive/creative uses of screen time, redirect to in-person ways of getting together. Learn more about specific apps [here](#).

If nothing seems to work, get more support - A 3rd party (therapist, pediatrician, or counselor) may be helpful.

iPHONES

You can remove & restrict social media apps and YouTube!

One option for reeling in social media use is to “downgrade” to a simpler mobile phone without social media on it. See options [here](#)! If your tween or teen has an iPhone, you can remove and restrict the stickiest apps (like social media) with Apple ScreenTime Parental Controls. It’s never too late to reel in use and make changes.



Take a moment to figure out which of the social media apps (including YouTube Shorts) on your child’s iPhone is the most disruptive or causing the most issues. Address that one first and discuss proposed changes with your tween/teen. For example, if your child spends too much time on Instagram, you can remove that app or set a time limit until they are older and you’re ready to revisit. Or the most sticky apps can instead be accessible only on a less portable device that stays home. Use our [Tech Check video tutorial](#) to reel in iPhone use.

Remember: How you set up an iPhone makes all the difference!

TOP TIP: To set up an overnight Downtime, set App Limits, and turn on “Content & Privacy Restrictions” go to *Settings > Screen Time*

SOCIAL MEDIA SAFEGUARDS

Experts recommend **delaying social media access until at least age 16**. If your tween or teen already has access, we recommend these safeguards to reduce harm.



Remove or restrict **ONE** social media app at a time



PRIVATE

Set account to **private** so content is only visible to trusted people



Set up account using the **correct birthdate**



Protect your profile

No personal details like your real name or school



Limit followers to people you know in real life



Explore filters like Gryphon (router) or Bark (software) to monitor social media use



Turn off notifications within the app or device to minimize disruption



Remove devices from bedrooms overnight to **protect sleep** and reduce harm



Talk about fake content, sextortion, porn, substance use, racism, and other topics that are all over social media



Know what your tween/teen is doing online - ask for a tour of their feed and talk about how the algorithm works

PROTECT SLEEP!

Adolescents need 8-12 hours of sleep, depending on their age. If late night scrolling on social media apps or secret device use is interfering with your child's sleep, here are some practical and immediate steps you can take to help them get the sleep they need!



Get an old-school alarm clock.

Doesn't matter what kind - just make sure it's quiet (no one wants a ticking clock by the bed) and easy to set. Added perk: Getting kids to set their own alarms is great practice for building executive function muscles! Our favorites [here](#).



Set up a communal charging station.

This can be in a public space or in the parent's/caregiver's room. Find charging station options [here](#).



Set up an overnight "Downtime".

Apple products feature a ScreenTime setting called Downtime that can be used to keep features on [iPhones](#) and [iPads](#) inaccessible overnight. [Google Family Link](#) has similar tools if your child has an Android device.

If you need stronger boundaries, use these settings and feel comforted that your child won't be online while you are blissfully asleep.



Turn off WiFi at night.

This can be set up through your router. You can also use content filters to block inappropriate sites and manage device-specific schedules for internet use. Click [here](#) for instructions and info.

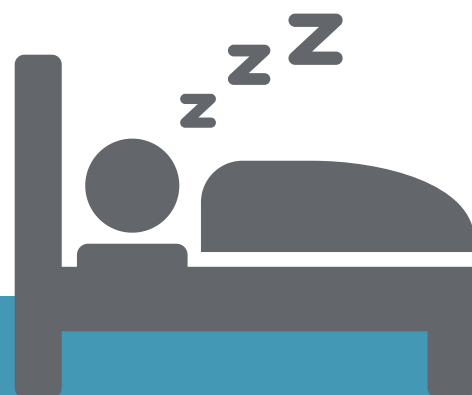


Turn off cell service at night.

AT&T: [SmartHome Manager App](#)

Verizon: [Verizon Family App](#)

T-Mobile: [T-Mobile FamilyMode](#)



TOP TIP: Combine multiple tools for consistent boundaries; tech tools can support your parenting but cannot replace conversations and guidance.

TECH TALKS: SOCIAL MEDIA!

Having regular conversations with your teen about social media is an essential harm reduction strategy!

Use these prompts to initiate conversations about savvy consumption, wellbeing, & balance.

How do you think social media influencers make money? How about social media companies?

What do you think about this:
Social media may be free, but you pay with your time.

How can we both keep our {social media} use in check? Can we help each other as accountability partners?

How do you keep yourself safe on social media? How can I also help keep you safe?

What are some offline interests you want to pursue this year? What social media limits could support these goals?

Depending on how you use social media each day, do you notice differences in your mood, motivation, energy, or stress levels? How so?

What do you think is the “influencer’s playbook”? How do they get followers?

What “sticky” design features do you notice on {name of app}? How can you stay focused on your purpose?

How do you tell the difference between real vs. fake content? How about ads? How about AI-generated content?

What are you mostly doing when you’re on {social media app}? What draws you in? What do you try to avoid?

Do you think spending your time on {this app} supports or undermines your values, goals, & wellbeing? How so?

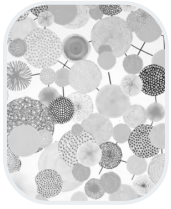
What do you wish I knew or understood about {name of social media app}?

Let’s talk about how the algorithm works. Can we look together at your feed on {name of app}?



TO CO-WATCH WITH TWEENS & TEENS

To facilitate meaningful conversations
& critical thinking about social media use



[The Teen Brain](#) (10 min, 2024, ages 10+)

Directed by local Emmy-nominated director Tiffany Shlain, this 10-minute film speaks directly to teens and parents, exploring what's happening in the teenage brain. Use [these discussion questions](#) to facilitate conversation.



[Dino Ambrosi's Ted Talk](#) (11 min, 2023, ages 11+)

Dino Ambrosi, the founder of Project Reboot, highlights how social media may be free, but you pay with your time, in turn empowering healthier habits. After watching, fill in this [screen time calculator](#) and compare findings.



[Childhood 2.0](#) (1.5 hours, 2020, ages 13+)

Documentary about the changing face of childhood in this digital age



[Social Studies](#) (5 episodes, 2024, ages 14+)

A groundbreaking, character-driven documentary series that delves into the lives of the first generation of digital natives.



[The Social Dilemma](#) (1.5 hours, 2020, ages 13+)

This documentary-drama hybrid explores the dangerous human impact of social media, with tech experts sounding the alarm on their own creations.



[Toxic Influence - a Dove Film](#) (3.5 min, 2022, ages 13+)

This short film is a great conversation starter about the toxic beauty content that's all over social media. This is geared towards girls but boys are also exposed to similarly toxic messaging.

TOOLS FOR TEENS

TO HELP TEENS DEVELOP AGENCY OVER HOW THEY USE
TECH AND WHAT INFLUENCES THEM



Apps to help get your tech use in check: *most have free versions/trials*
[Clearspace](#) | [Freedom](#) | [Opal](#) | [Be Present](#)



Review your [Apple Screen Time data](#) and then use a [Screen Time Calculator](#) to reflect on how you use time.



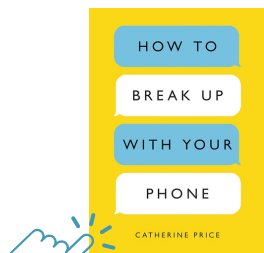
Khan Academy's [Social Media Literacy course](#) teaches you all about social media's business model, sticky design, and its impact on your brain.



[Brick](#) turns your smartphone into the less distracting tool you actually want - with a quick tap whenever you want to focus or be present.

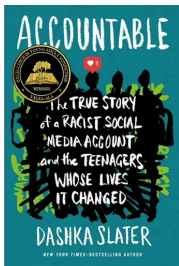


[ReDD \(Reduce Digital Distraction\)](#) browser extensions that let you control your social media experience.



[How to Break up with your Phone](#) (204 pages, 2025, ages 12+)

Author Catherine Price offers a 30-day plan with tested strategies and practical tips to break up with your phone, using a digital detox plan to set boundaries.



[Accountable](#) (496 pages, 2023, ages 12+)

Author Dashka Slater tells the gripping true story of a racist social media account that changed everything for a group of San Francisco Bay Area high school students.

STAY CONNECTED WITH US!



Join us in the Kids IRL [Parent Chat](#) on WhatsApp.

It's a supportive place for parents with kids of all ages in Marin to exchange ideas on how to slow down tech and expand in-real-life activities.



Come to our [new series](#) of monthly virtual tech talks!

Our Lunch & Learn casual sessions will cover specific topics about parenting tech. Short presentations with lots of time for Q&A! Don't miss Nov 13 - All things iPhone!

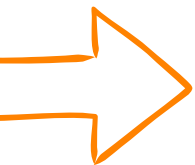


Connect with us [in person](#)!

Bring our parent ed events to your school or local community! Or connect with ScreenSense for 1:1 home tech consulting.

ABOUT SCREENSENSE & KIDS IRL

At ScreenSense, we help parents and schools implement and manage the guardrails needed to keep digital tech in check. Our Parent Education events and consulting services support **introducing tech slowly** so tech doesn't crowd out essential childhood activities. [Kids IRL](#) is our hyper-local collective action initiative in Marin County to help parent and school communities commit to doing this work together. **Click on the icons or links below.**



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