

DIGITAL WELLNESS

10 Rules for Raising Kids in a High Tech World

How Parents Can Stop Smartphones, Social Media, and Gaming from Taking Over Their Children's Lives

By: Jean M. Twenge, PhD

About the Book

Technology shapes almost every part of kids' lives—from smartphones and social media to video games and streaming. Dr. Jean Twenge, a psychologist and researcher, explains how too much screen time can affect mental health, relationships, sleep, and focus.

Her book gives families research-based strategies to set boundaries, delay certain technologies, and build strong habits that support healthy, balanced development.

The 10 Rules Summarized

Rule	Summary of the Rule
Rule 1 You're in Charge	Parents are in charge—not the device—set the boundaries, expectations, and tone for tech use in the home. When adults lead with clarity and confidence, kids feel safer and develop healthier, more balanced habits.
Rule 2 No electronic devices in the bedroom overnight	Keeping electronic devices out of the bedroom protects kids' sleep, safety, and mental well-being by keeping screens out of private spaces. When devices stay in shared charging stations, children rest better and avoid late-night distractions or unsafe online activity.
Rule 3 No Social Media until age 16 – or later	Avoiding social media until 16 years old helps protect developing teens from the pressures, comparison, and risks that come with early social media use. Waiting allows them to build the maturity, resilience, and judgment needed to navigate online spaces safely and confidently.
Rule 4 First phones should be basic phones	Starting with basic phones encourages families to start with simple, limited-function devices so kids can learn responsibility without the distractions and risks of smartphones. This gradual approach helps children build healthy tech habits before accessing full internet and app features.
Rule 5 Give the first Smartphone with the driver's license	Giving the first Smartphone with the driver's license aligns smartphone access with a milestone that requires responsibility, judgment, and independence. By waiting until teens demonstrate these skills, families set them up for safer and more thoughtful digital decision-making.

The 10 Rules Summarized Continued...

Rule	Summary of the Rule
Rule 6 Use Parental Controls	Using Parental Controls emphasizes that parents should actively guide and protect their children's online experiences. By setting boundaries on apps, content, and screen time, parents help kids develop safe, balanced, and age-appropriate technology habits.
Rule 7 Create No-Phone Zones	Creating No-Phone Zones encourages families to designate spaces and times where devices are off-limits, such as during meals or family activities. This promotes connection, presence, and healthy boundaries with technology.
Rule 8 Give your kids real world freedom	Giving Your Kids Real-World Freedom reminds parents to balance digital boundaries with opportunities for independence in everyday life. Allowing kids to explore, make decisions, and solve problems offline helps them develop responsibility, confidence, and resilience.
Rule 9 Beware the laptop--and the gaming console, and the tablet, and ...	Being aware of all devices warns parents that all connected devices can pose risks if used without guidance. Staying aware of the content, time, and social interactions on each device helps families protect kids and maintain healthy tech habits.
Rule 10 Advocate for no phones during the school day	Advocating for No Phone During the School Day encourages parents to support school policies that limit phone use in class. Reducing distractions helps students focus, learn more effectively, and engage fully in their education.

Practical Steps for Families

- Have a Family Tech Plan: write down your screen time rules together.
- Try a tech-free meal or evening 5 days a week.
- Talk about what's fun online—and what's not okay.
- Keep phones out of bedrooms to help everyone sleep better.
- Remember: "More Social, Less Media." Spend more time with people and less time on screens!

Cautions & Notes

- Twenge does not advocate for total digital elimination — the goal is healthy integration, not prohibition.
- Rules will look different depending on age, maturity, and family context.
- Some resistance or conflict from kids is natural — consistency, empathy, and explanation help.
- External pressures (school, peers, culture) make it challenging — community support or parent groups may help.