

Tech-Intentional Summers

Summer brings more freedom, more downtime, and often, a lot more screen time.

We created this resource to offer families a few thoughtful ideas for helping middle school students build healthy technology habits while still enjoying all the fun, connection, and independence that summer can bring.

We hope it gives you a few helpful ideas as you think about your family's summer routines, and we wish you a great summer ahead.



ASF **Tech-Intentional Summers**
For Families with Children Ages 11-14
A guide to reclaiming the season — with purpose, not punishment.

Why this summer matters

The brain at 11–14 is actively building itself.
These are among the most formative years in adolescent development. The brain is rewiring itself around identity, emotional regulation, and independence — and what fills that time shapes those structures.

*"Childhood has become phone-based and experience-poor."
— Jonathan Haidt, The Anxiety Generation*

Research consistently shows that students who spend more time in unstructured, offline activity — socialising, creating, even being bored — develop stronger resilience, better sleep habits, and healthier social skills.

Tech-intentional doesn't mean tech-free. It means your family decides when, why, and how technology earns a place in your day — rather than the other way around.

What the research tells us — and what it means

- 7–9 hrs**
Average daily recreational screen time in summer
This is what many kids actually end up using — not a recommendation. That's the length of a full school day, often spent on entertainment. Without intentional structure, screen time can quietly expand to fill most of the day.
- Bedroom devices**
The single most impactful habit to change
Devices in bedrooms at night directly disrupt sleep and mood — even when kids insist they only check them "a little." The fix is simple: charge devices outside the room, every night.
- Face-to-face time**
The strongest buffer against anxiety
In-person socialising — not texting or group chats — is consistently linked to lower rates of loneliness and better emotional regulation. It cannot be replicated online.
- Boredom**
Not the enemy — it's the engine
Unstructured downtime activates the brain's default mode network — the system behind creativity, self-reflection, and identity formation. Boredom is where kids discover who they are.



ASF Tech-Intentional Summers

The Tech-Intentional Framework

Technology doesn't disappear from your home this summer, it gets a job description. Right now, for most kids, screens are the default answer to any moment of downtime. The goal is to shift that: to make offline life the default, and technology a deliberate choice. **The three categories below are not rules**, they are a shared map your family can refer back to all summer long.

Expand These

These are the experiences that fill the gaps screens leave behind — building real-world skills, physical confidence, and friendships that only form through shared presence. At this age, kids need to discover what they're capable of away from a screen. These are the activities that make that happen.

- Creative projects: art, music, writing, cooking
- Sports, swimming, hiking, dance
- Face-to-face social time
- Family game nights
- Volunteering & community
- Reading — any genre
- Neighbourhood exploration

Be Intentional About These

Technology genuinely adds value here — but only when used with a clear purpose. The question to ask before picking up the device: "Do I have a specific reason for this right now, or am I just reaching for it?" A real answer puts it in this category. No answer puts it in the one below.

- Video calls with family & friends abroad
- Creative tools: music, art, coding, film
- Research for a personal interest or project
- Navigation & practical tools while travelling

Set Clear Limits

These aren't inherently harmful — but they are designed to expand. They start with five minutes and silently become two hours. They need a container: a time limit, a stopping point, a household rule agreed on in advance — not negotiated in the moment when everyone is already tired.

- Short-form video: Reels, TikTok, Shorts
- Open-ended social media scrolling
- Streaming without a specific show in mind
- Multiplayer gaming without time limits

Your Family Tech Agreement

- Define your screen-free zones — bedroom, dining table, first hour of morning
- Set daily device windows — e.g. 4–6 PM weekdays, flexible weekends with a cap
- The "ask before streaming" rule — intentional viewing is fine, mindless scrolling is what we replace
- Devices out of bedrooms by _____ PM every night
- One tech-free day per week — or a half-day, to start

Write it down. Sign it together. Put it on the fridge.
Kids this age respond far better to rules they helped shape.

Common Parent Questions

- "My child uses tech for creative work — music, film, art"**
That's wonderful. Give creative projects the "Expand" category. You have nothing to fear as a completely different experience from two hours scrolling.
- "My child will feel left out if their friends are all online."**
This is real. Consider calls with two or three other families — even one friend shipping back something from makes a significant difference to how they experience it.
- "We travel and only on devices for maps and entertainment."**
Screening travel can be fine. The goal is to replace the default mode — reaching for the device the moment any boredom appears.
- "My child pushes back hard. I don't want a summer of conflict."**
Start smaller than you think you need to. One device-free hour one screen-free day. Consistency over perfection — every day.



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Bedroom devices

The single most impactful habit to change

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Face-to-face time

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"My child uses tech for creative work — music, film, art."

That's intentional use. Active creation belongs in the "Expand" category. Two hours editing a film is a completely different experience from two hours scrolling.

"My child will feel left out if their friends are all online."

This is real. Coordinate with two or three other families — even one friend stepping back alongside them makes a significant difference to how they experience it.

"We travel and rely on devices for maps and entertainment."

Intentional travel use is fine. The goal is to replace the default mode — reaching for the device the moment any boredom appears.

"My child pushes back hard. I don't want a summer of conflict."

Start smaller than you think you need to. One device-free hour, one screen-free zone. Consistency over ambition — every time.