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Tips to Get Teens to Put Down Their Smartphones



Keep devices out of kids' bedrooms

There is strong data linking bedroom screen time with a variety of risks—particularly sleep loss, says David Hill, director of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Communications and Media. Even among adults, before-bed media use is associated with insomnia. And kids need more sleep than grownups. Taking away a child's phone at bedtime can be a battle, but it's worth the fight.



Set online firewalls and data cutoffs

It's unrealistic to expect teens to stay away from illicit content or to moderate their social-media use, says Frances Jensen, chair of neurology at the University of Pennsylvania. A young person's brain is wired for exploration and, to some extent, thrill-seeking—not restraint. Most devices and Internet providers, as well as some apps, offer parenting tools that restrict access to problematic content and curb data use. Take advantage of them.



Create a device contract

"This is something you create with your child that details rules around their device use," says Yalda Uhls, an assistant adjunct professor at UCLA and the author of *Media Moms & Digital Dads*. These rules could include no smartphones at the dinner table, or no more than an hour of social media use after school. If a child violates the rules, he or she should lose the phone for a period of time.



Model healthy device behaviors

Just as kids struggle to stay off their phones, so do parents. And if you're a phone junkie yourself, you can't expect your kids to be any different, says Jensen. Apart from putting your own phone away while driving or during mealtimes, it's important to recognize that your kids see what you put online. If you're criticizing another parent on Facebook or slamming someone's political beliefs on Twitter, your kids will follow suit.



Consider old-school flip phones

Or try a smartphone without a data plan. This may seem like overkill for some parents—especially those of older teens. But unconnected phones still allow teens to call or text, says Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University and the author of *iGen*. And kids can access social media or videos from home computers and tablets during their free time. But when they're out in the world, they won't be tempted with all-the-time access to screen-based distractions.