

# How families glued to separate devices can connect again

March 8 2024, by Elise Waghorn

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It's Saturday afternoon and the kids are all connected to separate devices. So are the parents. Sounds familiar?

Many families want to set ground rules to help them reduce their [screen time](#)—and have time to connect with each other, without devices.

But it can be difficult to know where to start and how to make a plan that suits your family.

## **First, look at your own screen time**

Before telling children to "hop off the tech," it's important [parents](#) understand how much they are using screens themselves.

Globally, the average person [spends](#) an average of six hours and 58 minutes on screens each day. This has increased by 13%, or 49 minutes, since 2013.

Parents who report high screen time use [tend to see this](#) filtering down to the children in their family too. [Two-thirds](#) of primary school-aged children in Australia have their own mobile screen-based device.

Australia's screen time guidelines [recommended](#) children aged five to 17 years have no more than two hours of sedentary screen time (excluding homework) each day. For those aged two to five years, it's no more than one hour a day. And the guidelines recommend no screen time at all for children under two.

Yet the majority of children, across age groups, exceed these maximums. A [new Australian study released this week](#) found the average three-year-old is exposed to two hours and 52 minutes of screen time a day.

## **Some screen time is OK, too much increases risks**

Technology has profoundly impacted children's lives, offering both opportunities and challenges.

On one hand, it provides access to [educational resources](#), can develop creativity, facilitates communication with peers and family members, and allows students to seek out new information.

On the other hand, excessive screen use [can result in](#) too much time being sedentary, delays in [developmental milestones](#), disrupted [sleep](#) and daytime drowsiness.

Too much screen time can [affect social skills](#), as it replaces time spent in face-to-face social interactions. This is where children learn verbal and non-verbal communication, develop empathy, learn patience and how to take turns.

Many families also [worry about](#) how to maintain a [positive relationship](#) with their children when so much of their time is spent glued to screens.

## **What about when we're all on devices?**

When families are all using devices simultaneously, it results in less face-to-face interactions, reducing communication and resulting in a shift in family dynamics.

The increased use of wireless technology enables families to easily tune out from each other by putting in earphones, reducing the [opportunity for conversation](#). Family members wearing earphones during shared activities or meals creates a [physical barrier](#) and encourages people to retreat into their own digital worlds.

Wearing earphones for long periods may also [reduce](#) connection to, and closeness with, family members. Research from [video gaming](#), for

instance, found excessing gaming increases feelings of isolation, loneliness and the displacement of real-world social interactions, alongside weakened relationships with peers and [family members](#).

## **How can I set screen time limits?**

Start by sitting down as a family and [discussing what limits](#) you all feel would be appropriate when using TVs, phones and gaming—and when is an appropriate time to use them.

Have [set rules](#) around family time—for example, no devices at the dinner table—so you can connect through face-to-face interactions.

Consider locking your phone or devices away at certain periods throughout the week, such as after 9pm (or within an hour of bedtime for younger children) and seek out opportunities to balance your days with physical activities, such kicking a footy at the park or going on a family bush walk.

Parents can model healthy behavior by regulating and setting limits on their own screen time. This might mean limiting your social media scrolling to 15 or 30 minutes a day and keeping your phone in the next room when you're not using it.

When establishing appropriate boundaries and ensuring children's safety, it is crucial for parents and guardians to engage in open communication about technology use. This [includes](#) teaching critical thinking skills to navigate online content safely and employing parental control tools and privacy settings.

Parents can foster a supportive and trusting relationship with children from an early age so [children](#) feel comfortable discussing their online experiences and sharing their fears or concerns.

For resources to help you develop your own family's screen time plan, visit the [Raising Children Network](#).

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