

## PARENT'S GUIDE

We believe in the importance of parents helping children find a healthy balance with screen time. This is challenging! Our *Screenagers* team is made up of parents who know this all too well. We hope you find the ideas below helpful. You can also consult many resources at [www.screenagersmovie.com](http://www.screenagersmovie.com). We would love to hear from you. Please share your ideas on Facebook (@screenagersmovie).

### FAMILY SCREEN TIME CONVERSATIONS

To be effective in influencing your children on this issue, begin by committing to have many short, calm and caring conversations. Start with this guide and continue by participating in **Tech Talk Tuesdays** using conversation prompts from the *Screenagers* website.

#### Some things to consider before you begin

1. There may be a lot of built-up tension about these topics in your home. That is normal! Parents often express anxiety and frustration, and children may feel defensive.
2. Keep in mind that a big goal is to help everyone become more conscious of when and why they use technology and how it affects self-esteem, social skills, relationships, work, academics and more. Being conscious is key to making realistic use guidelines.
3. Start conversations by encouraging everyone to share positive aspects of technology in their lives. Then move on to ideas about when screens should be turned off.
4. Include your own technology behavior goals in the conversations. Finding balance is a joint family project, not one of adults versus kids.
5. Stick with it — over time, these conversations build trust and understanding so behaviors can really change.

#### Some discussion questions

- **How much time** do you think kids in the US spend looking at a screen on average? (Kids spend an average of 6.5 hours a day on screens, not including classroom or homework screen time, according to a 2015 Common Sense Media report.)
- How much time do adults spend on their phones? How about teens?
- How much time do you think you spend every week on screen-related activities? (Turn this into a non-judgmental **tech-use inventory** family game and guess what each person wrote.)
- How often do you **multitask**? Do you think it affects you in any way? (A study by Common Sense Media reports that nearly 2/3 of teens do not think watching television, texting or using social media while doing homework has an impact on them. Meanwhile research has shown that when people “task-shift” — tackle multiple tasks simultaneously — they are less effective than when they do one task at a time. The brain is not capable of focusing on two mental activities at once, and thus the idea that multitasking boosts performance is a myth.)
- What activities do you like that don't involve screens? (Think of **offline activities** that are valuable and fun like playing outside, sports, music, reading, hobbies, community service, family time and even chores.)

- Does using screens **change your brain**? (The film featured a study in which baby mice exposed to screen time developed fewer cells in the areas of learning and memory than non-exposed mice. Could this prove true for humans too?)
- Why do so many **video games** involve violence? (First-person shooter games were first developed by the military to decrease sensitivity to shooting people. What are some popular games that don't involve violence?)
- Have you seen **social media** affect our behavior? (Have you experienced people using screens to avoid face-to-face interactions or make comments they would not make in person?)

## FAMILY ACTION ITEMS

### **Strengthen Self Control** (read more about this at our website)

Research shows that strong self control is a better **predictor of academic and other success** than is IQ. To help kids “strengthen the muscle” of self control, clear guidelines around technology are needed. Instructions like, “Don’t be on your phone so much” sets them up for failure because they are too vague. When you connect with your children to decide together **how much screen time** is acceptable, such as 30 minutes for video games every other day, **and when** to be off a cell phone, like at dinner or in the morning before school, success is much more attainable.

Recognize situations when self control is not working for your child. It often makes sense to remove screens or use software that limits screen time. For example, Delaney, the filmmaker, used the app OurPact to turn off her daughter Tessa’s apps at night when Tessa was having a hard time getting off the phone on her own.

### **Create A Contract / Family Agreement** (find examples and templates at our website)

A contract is where you put into writing the guidelines you create together based on your conversations about what are the acceptable amounts of time, times of day and situations to be on screens and be off screens.

Some contracts limit screen use in the car, after certain hours at night, in the bedroom, at the dinner table or during homework except for periodic tech breaks. Different families do it differently, but it is **not too late** to do something.

Build in **rewards** for success in sticking to the contract. Rewards have been proven to be much more effective in creating behavior change than punishments. And be **flexible** about adjusting the contract as you learn what works best.

**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU AND YOUR KIDS! The filmmaker and producers can all be reached at [info@screenagersmovie.com](mailto:info@screenagersmovie.com).**

**Warmly,  
Delaney and the whole team!**