gaming
addiction

parentline.com.au

The Internet and The Brain

Many of the games and platforms that young people (and adults) use are designed to capture attention and keep people coming back for more. The brain basics[1]:

- The way we are 'rewarded' by social media and games is unpredictable (we don't know when the reward is coming)...

- When the reward does come, our brain sends out feel good chemicals (like dopamine)...

- We chase those feel-good chemicals by continuing to engage with the content (this is partly why "one more game" or "one more episode" isn't always the case)...

What can you do?

As a parent or carer, the good news is that there are several steps you can take to support balance with your child's time online. This can include:

- Setting clear time limits and boundaries that are consistently enforced

- Creating and fostering opportunities for them to engage in other activities

- Supporting them to take regular breaks

- Removing distractions at bedtime

- Talking about their time online openly and regularly

Set clear time limits and boundaries

Setting clear time limits and boundaries is a great way to support your child to balance their tech time. Including the whole family in these conversations is a great way to empower your children to be involved in the conversation and come to an agreement as a family. *See our Setting Boundaries Resources at parentline.com.au for more information*.

1. Set a time as a household to sit down and have a conversation. Give everyone some lead time to think about the things they'd like to include (a helpful place to find suggestions for where to start is eSafety's Family Tech Agreement or the Beacon App).

2. Limit access to devices and other potential distractions during the conversation.

3. Allow everyone to make suggestions and try to understand the why behind suggestions you may not immediately agree with. For example, it's important to understand what your kids spend most of their time online doing...Is it schoolwork? Or is it socialising with friends and family? Or is it engaging in a hobby?

4. Write it all down, sign it, stick it somewhere you can all see everyday and set a date to review it together.
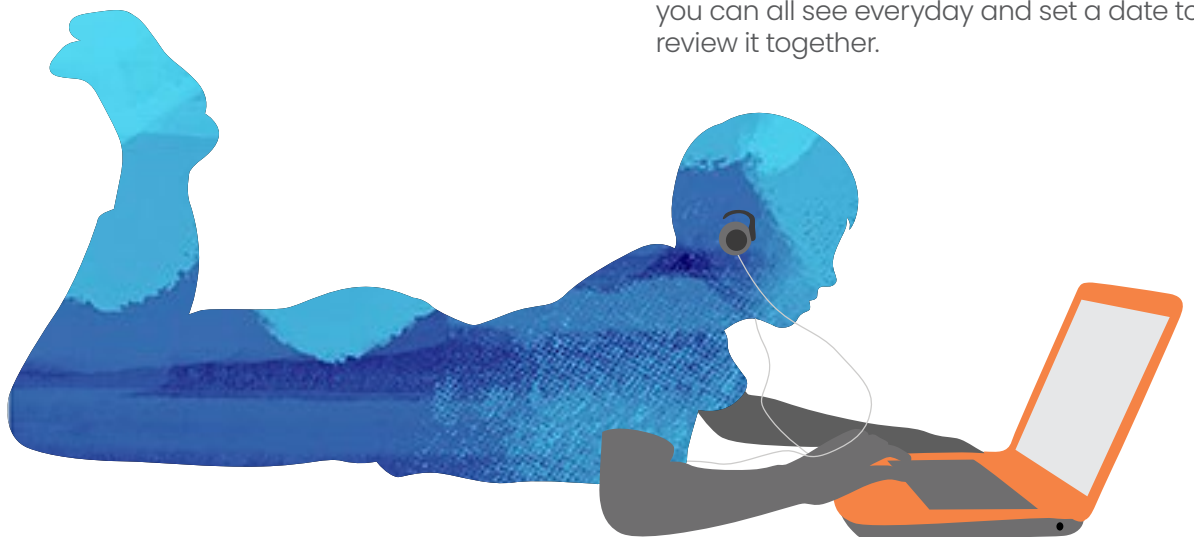
Service funded by

Queensland Government

parentline.com.au/cyberbullying

gaming
addiction

Engaging in other activities

It's important that children and young people have other enjoyable activities to occupy their time and minds if you're supporting them to reduce and/or balance their time online.

Why? They're more likely to get on board with the boundaries if the alternative is fun and promotes the release of some of those feel good chemicals (that we receive when we spend time online).

Consider: If you had to spend less time doing something you love, what kind of activities would you want to replace it with and why?

Tip: Ask them the same questions!

It's super important that children have a say in what kind of activities this might include for them (different people find joy and excitement in different things and are more likely to be on board when they feel a sense of empowerment over the decision!)

**These activities might be individual (that they do) or family based (that you all do).
For example:**

AS A INDIVIDUAL

Playing a sport or doing another physical activity

Doing something creative (like an art class)

Learning an instrument

Reading (and going to the library)

Learning a new skill

AS A FAMILY

Regular household movie night

Regular family walk, bike ride, time at the park

Having a games night

Family dinner night/s

Plan an indoor or outdoor picnic

These are just some ideas! Brainstorming some more as a family is a great way to connect and learn more about each other's likes and dislikes.

Taking regular breaks

Encourage them taking short breaks to stretch and rest their eyes every 20-30 minutes. Teach them how to keep track of the time and model this behaviour to them.

Removing distractions at bedtime

It is totally normal for children (and adults) to have difficulty exercising self-control when it comes to watching that next episode or playing that next game or scrolling to that next TikTok.

Try setting a time with your child where their devices are switched off and put away (outside of their room so they aren't tempted to jump back on) each night.

Turning off and removing tech from the bedroom in the 1 hour (approximately) before bed can be great for young people (and adults) to:

- help to ensure they (we) get enough good quality sleep (which has heaps of health benefits);
- limit blue light exposure before bed;
- reduce the temptation to stay up to see that next episode or game or post; and
- help to 'switch off' and wind down at the end of each day

Talking about time online openly and regularly

Having regular, open conversations with children and young people about what they are doing online is a great way to connect with them, and better understand the activities they engage in online.

Highlight to them that this isn't an interrogation(!) but more so a chance to chat, and that they're not going to get into trouble or get a lecture.

The good news...spending time online is not all bad!

Remember that gaming and spending time online isn't always a negative!

Spending time online can allow children to connect with their friends and family; learn about topics of interest; engage in hobbies; build skills in the online and offline world and so much more.

Learn more about supporting your child's online wellbeing by speaking to one of Parentline's qualified counsellors at 1300 30 1300 or accessing free resources at parentline.com.au/cyberbullying

PLC0005

parentline.com.au/cyberbullying