

## Managing Screen Time with your neurodivergent child or young person

**Neurodivergent children & young people (CYP)** can enjoy benefits using phones, tablets, games consoles & other devices. They keep up to speed with what's important to them: their friends, fandom, gaming skills... However, the lure of the screen can be difficult to walk away from, which leaves less time for other important activities like homework and quality family time. Here are some ideas to help them put that device down.



### 1. Take an interest

Ask what they like doing on their devices and listen to why. Try to understand what's in it for them and why they spend so much time on their devices. This will prompt ideas for alternative, enjoyable activities. For example:

- Want to chat with friends? Offer to arrange for friends to come over.
- Like being good at a game? Plan fun, family gaming nights when they enjoy beating you!
- Search for suitable family video games (even for grandparents,) on the Taming Gaming website: <https://www.taminggaming.com/en-gb/search>

### 2. Make the rules clear

- Discuss with your child when and how long they use their device. Understand the time it takes to play their favourite game to judge when natural breaks are likely to occur as it's easier to come off at these points, so less arguments for you. Or you could set how many games they can play, rather than a specific time frame.
- Formalise rules using a family agreement:
  - <https://www.childnet.com/resources/family-agreement>
  - <https://www.internetmatters.org/connecting-safely-online/things-to-do-together-to-help-young-people-connect-with-others-safely/family-agreement-activities-to-do-together/>

### 3. Prepare

Before your child goes on their device:

- Remind them of the rules, including the time they are going to spend or how many games they are going to play.
- Help them establish boundaries by asking what they are going to do on the device, so that they have a specific activity or purpose in mind instead of wandering aimlessly around online
- Agree what they are going to do when they finish. For those who find it particularly difficult to come off, it helps if they know specifically what they are going to do afterwards rather than being left at a loose end, especially if it's something they also enjoy.

### 4. Help them keep track of time

Some children and young people need reminders of remaining time on their device. You can:

- Flag when they're halfway through and when there's 5-10 minutes left
- Set visual timers so they can see the time elapsing: try sand timers or download free timer apps
- If they have an agreed number of games instead of a time limit, from time to time ask how many games they've played.



## 5. Settings

Use device settings and controls for boundaries and establish norms around length of time on devices, especially for younger children. There's information about how to do this on Internet Matters: <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/>

Young people can use settings to manage their own screen time. Encourage them to:

- Turn off social media notifications
- Turn off auto-play on the apps they use to watch videos, like Facebook and YouTube
- Move tempting apps to the last screen on their Smartphone

- Check the time they are spending on different apps to increase their awareness – it's likely to be longer than they think. The Screen Time functionality on Apple devices and the Digital Wellbeing app for Android devices can help with this.
- Use in-built tools in apps, such as the Take a Break reminder on YouTube.
- There are also apps encouraging you to take time out from screens. Check out the Forest app: <https://www.forestapp.cc/>

## 6. Setting an Example

**How much time are you spending on your devices? Children are more likely to do what we do, than what we say.**



These apps are all **free** to download

