



The Massachusetts Council
ON GAMING AND HEALTH

SCHOOL'S OUT, CONTROLLERS OUT

Setting limits around summer gaming

Summer break brings vacations, camps, less structure — and more potential time for video gaming. Check out our 10 tips on talking about screen time with your kids and establishing safe, healthy practices.

1. Put on your listening ears.

Kids enjoy demonstrating independence, and children as young as six or seven may have opinions about their video gaming. Discuss why they want to play, what your concerns are, and why you have those concerns. You can still make decisions in your child's best interest, but it's vital for them to feel heard and understand your reasoning.

2. Limit screen time to 1-2 hours a day.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting entertainment screen time to less than two hours per day. For kids under 6, keep screen time to one hour.

3. Don't mix bedrooms and screens.

Research overwhelmingly shows that screens and bedrooms aren't a winning combination. Strive to keep any gaming in common spaces like a family room. Turn off devices at meals and bedtimes. If your child has to rise early for a day camp or job, use an alarm clock instead of a phone.

4. Brush up on your knowledge.

Most apps, streaming services, and games require users to have specific permissions. Set up new accounts together and explain why you are making certain restrictions. Ask questions about their favorite games or show you the ropes.

5. Create a family media plan.

Craft an agreement setting expectations for how everyone in your home uses screens. Perhaps all games with violence or graphic content are off-limits. Or no gaming until chores are completed and your child has played outside for an hour. Kids and teens should weigh in to make sure that screens don't crowd out summer obligations, healthy meals, physical activity, free play, and sleep. Plan to revisit this agreement monthly or make adjustments at the start of the school year.

6. Stick to your rules.

Know and approve of which games your child is playing. And establish immediate age-appropriate consequences if those rules are ignored or broken. Kids may be quick to point out seeming hypocrisy, so be mindful of your screen use.

7. Recognize that many kids use gaming to cope.

Excessive gaming can be a way for youth to cope with or escape stressors. Offer to be a listening ear for situations at school or with friends and model healthy ways to problem solve and address conflict.

8. Be empowered to set controls.

Nintendo, Xbox, Playstation, and Apple products all have parental control features, including a timer that shuts off a console after allotted gaming time is up. If you find online instructions hard to follow, call the company's support phone number.

9. Explore the world outside screens.

Gaming can be done almost any time with little planning or effort. Encourage and plan outdoor play, art, music, reading, new hobbies, and real-world activities.

10. Share your approach.

Family members, sitters, and other parents may have different views on video gaming. Ahead of a play date or a night away, talk about the guidelines you've set up.

Resources

[Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School's Digital Wellness Lab Guide](#)

[American Academy of Pediatrics' Family Media Plan Creator](#)

[University of Michigan's Healthier Video Game Habits for Parents of Teens](#)