# TECH CONTROL

Managing screen time is something many parents can relate to. Experts share some ideas for getting the balance back. By

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PARENTS are more concerned than ever about how tech is eating into family time and damaging their children's health, according to a new report.



There are benefits to being online but it can go too far

Some 63% of parents said they believe time spent online is negatively affecting their children's health, while 50% were worried screen time was impacting their sleep.

Online safety charity Internet Matters surveyed 1,000 families on their digital habits for their latest annual report.

However, despite the concerns, the study also found the overall digital wellbeing of children was getting better, with rising numbers of young people highlighting that they have experienced the benefits of being online, including feeling more confident, creative and empowered. Carolyn Bunting, co-chief executive of Internet Matters, says: "The impact of technology on children and family life is complex, bringing both benefits and concerns. Many parents are increasingly worried that tech devices are eating into family time and about screen time strains on their children's physical health, sleep and concentration. "The glowing blue light under the bedroom door is something many parents know all too well, and some children say they are unable to control how long they spend online." Does this sound familiar in your household? So, how can parents find a healthy balance and carve out more m tech-free family time?

CREATE PHONE-FREE ZONES

Creating a phone-free zone could have many benefits, helping redeem quality family time and setting a good example for children (as parents will have to abide by the rules, too!).

"Make meal times or other moments during your day screenfree, phone-free zones. This creates boundaries and limits the time your children spend on their devices," suggests Holly Zoccolan, parenting expert and founder of the Carol app. Heidi Skudder, parenting expert at The Baby Show and founder of Positively Parenthood, adds: "For example, Sundays are great to spend as a family with walks, lunch together and some downtime. But remember as a parent, you will have to rolemodel this too."

ENCOURAGE CREATIVE AND ARTISTIC PURSUITS

"Taking part in family activities is not only great for bonding and maintaining relationships, but is also good for children's mental health, combating loneliness, and it gives children soft skills they need for later life, such as teamwork and collaboration, creativity, confidence, courage, and project management," says Robert Anderson, global teacher training and development manager at Stagecoach Performing Arts. Activities could include a family talent show, where you could re-enact scenes from family-favourite films, or karaoke. Even whipping something up in the kitchen could be turned into a bigger event. "Cooking a treat with family members. For example, baking cookies or a cake together – turning it into a cookery TV show – a bit of drama," Robert adds.

"You could read a story with each family member taking turns to narrate and act out the characters.

"A themed puppet show using puppets made from socks or paper bags, and entertaining the kids with a fun and interactive show. Create a music video, complete with choreographed dance moves and costumes. Share it with family

and friends."

TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR CONCERNS

Fiona Yassin, psychotherapist and founder and clinical director of The Wave Clinic, says: "In the clinical world, there are systems and processes in place to help young people deal with overwhelming emotions and anxiety. But in the social media environment, where young people have access to an endless stream of often uncensored content, no such support exists.

"Parents and carers may feel under huge strain trying to protect their child's mental health. There will be times parents feel nothing they can say or do is right. It's important to recognise you have not failed as a parent if your young person is struggling with the all-consuming world of social media."

Fiona adds: "If unrealistic beauty standards particularly impact your young person, for example, help them to understand that the images they see on social media are often manipulated and, or, edited. "Make them aware that many celebrities have big teams behind their look, including nutritionists, personal trainers, and make-up artists, and understand it is simply not realistic to try to achieve that ideal as a normal human being. "As a parent who may not have grown up in an online world, you may need to educate yourself on this first."

USE SCREEN TIME AS A REWARD

Giving children an incentive could also help reduce the amount of time they spend in front of a screen. "Set up a system where kids can get screen time for doing their homework, doing chores, or engaging in other good deeds. This promotes delayed gratification and it's seen as a treat, rather than a musthave or something they depend on," suggests Tinuke Awe, founder of Mums and Tea, Learning With Ez and co-founder of Five x More.