

## Six top tips to cut kids' screen time

Parents and experts share their game-changers for reducing tech use. LISA SALMON finds out more

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CHILDREN and young people's obsession with screens can drive their parents mad – almost literally.

Frequent battles over how long kids spend on screens can stress some grown-ups out, and this year's Parent Mental Health Day (January 30) has a theme of #ScreenSmartParenting to address growing concerns about the impact of technology on families' wellbeing.

“Inevitably, too much engagement on screens may lead to parents worrying about what their child or young person might be exposed to,” says consultant clinical psychologist Dr Nihara Krause, founder of the teenage mental health charity stem4, which runs Parent Mental Health Day.

“There may be difficulty in gauging how screen time might be affecting children and young people, a lack of balance in terms of other activities, and a general feeling of not being in control.” Mum Liat Hughes Joshi, author of *How To Unplug Your Child* (published in paperback by Vie Books on February 13, priced £7.99), stresses: “When I talk to parents about the toughest issues they face with their children, screen time is top of the list for very many of them. In some families it's a daily battleground, in others still a source of worry for parents.”

But what are the game-changers parents have implemented that reduced their kids' screen time – and, consequently, their own worries?

Dr Krause asked three mums and a dad, who have children aged from 12-17 years, what worked for them...

Stand firm, be confident in what you're trying to do, and it can make a difference Author Liat Hughes Joshi

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One parent said they made an effort to get to know what their child was doing online, joining in some games and activities, and then discussing what might make it hard to limit screen time and devising steps how to do it.

The parent said: “I felt like if I couldn't beat them, I'd join them, and once I really understood Understanding their online world what the draw was, I could help them to learn to spend their time wisely.”

■ ■ Use parental controls after discussing it with the kids

Dr Krause says another parent's game-changer was: “Limiting screen time with controls, but discussing why these limits were set, and reviewing them regularly.”

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Rather than just expecting kids to go 'cold turkey' without constant screen time, Dr Krause explains: "One parent felt they had to compete with limiting screen time by offering something extra and exciting, and although ultimately this took some arrangement in terms of schedules, they felt it contributed to enhanced communication and fun family activities."

Provide an enticing alternative ■ ■ Negotiation and collaboration

Dr Krause says another simple game-changer is involving the child in any decisions made about screen time, as it can promote harmony instead of a battle.

■ ■ Screen-free bedrooms overnight

Liat says charging phones downstairs at night can be a real game-changer for parents.

"This isn't just about helping them relax before sleep, it's also preventing that 'must check my phone' feeling as soon as they wake up," she points out.

■ ■ Try to change your own attitude towards your child's screen time

Liat says other parents might benefit from rethinking their approach to screen time. She explains:

"Beyond what you try and change in your child's device use, you can alter your reaction to all this.

"What can you do to relax more and get perspective to choose what does and doesn't matter so much about it?" She adds: "None of this is easy. I've been there. I get it.

"But stand firm, be confident in what you're trying to do, and it can make a difference."