

Family Screen Time Agreement Template and Ideas by Delaney, filmmaker of Screenagers

1. Defining Your Family's General Principles

Start with a question such as—what are the main reasons we want to have balance in our lives regarding screen time and other activities?

Parents: Think about your “why”—why do you care how much time kids spend on screens? Mine, for example, is that I want my kids to have time to be exposed to many different situations offline so they can be more effective in three main areas: **creativity, communication and competency**. I want them to have many different experiences where they are 1. creating things (such as art and creating their own opinions 2. communicating (such as building face-to-face communication skills they can use even when they feel vulnerable -such as talking to a teacher about academic concerns 3. trying new activities that builds resilience, self-esteem and a sense of “can do”—all things related to competency.

Kids: Ask kids about how they think screen time should fit into their lives? What are some of their personal goals around things such as family, friends and hobbies? At first they may just shrug hopefully it will spark some good discussion.

Other topic ideas: Internet safety, privacy, time management, plagiarism, appropriate posts, online bullying and kindness.

2. Defining Family Rules

This is where you translate your principles into your “tech limits,” “agreements,” “rules,” however you want to label them. The main focus is determining times when screens should be put away.

Some examples include:

- Meal times — Are devices allowed at the table? Breakfast? Dinner?
- Night power-down — When to turn off screens/phones before bedtime

- Bedroom — Screens in the bedroom? If so, all the time? Are phones allowed in the bedroom?
- Cars — May non-drivers be on their phones?

3. Establishing Incentives and Consequences

One of the hardest things about parenting is enforcing guidelines/rules. The two main goals are to have a limited number of rules and to have the kids help create them inline with their maturity level. For rules to be effective, there needs to be incentives and consequences in place. Research tells us that our behaviors are more likely to be changed through positive incentives than deterrents. This is especially true for kids.

When coming up with positive incentives, get input from your kids. For example, if your child gives her phone to you at 9 pm without asking, then Friday night is dessert night, special film night, parents pick up her room (just kidding), but you get idea.

We all know that negative consequences are a lot easier to make--i.e. take the phone away. But the key is to not over punish. For example, Tessa has a rule that there are no screens, including her phone, in her room. When I was filming *Screenagers* I found that many young teens disappear into their rooms with their phones. Tessa is accustomed to having a phone-free room now and she says it motivates her to do other things like write in her journal. Now and then, she does sneak her phone in into her room, but instead of getting mad, I talk to her about it and simply ask her to go out of her room with it. However, if it happens again, I take her phone and keep it for the night.

4. Allow wiggle room

We all know that real life requires wiggle room. Thinking about the times that may come up when someone needs to go on a screen despite the rule and how these situations should be handled is also important. This is a part of tech etiquette.

For example, in our family, we have a no-cell-phones-in-the car policy, but there are times when something important comes up and someone has to do a quick check. The

kids know that I appreciate it when they tell me why they are breaking the rule, so they might say, “I am telling Ben that we are late to pick him up.” I also follow the same etiquette, so if my son Chase is driving and if I have to do something quickly on my phone, I tell him.