

## Angle 1: Tips for managing tech use during holiday family gatherings

### 10 Tips for Helping Your Family Go Low-er Tech This Holiday Season

If the sounds of ringtones, alerts, and push notifications have replaced those of sleigh bells, holiday music, and crackling fires, you may be craving a lower-tech holiday season for you and your family. Below are 10 tips for turning this seemingly impossible challenge into a reality—instead embracing conversation, communication, and bonding this holiday season—courtesy of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s (ASHA) Healthy Communication & Popular Technology Initiative:

1. **Model Desired Tech Behavior and Values.** There’s been enough press lately reframing the technology conversation (i.e., that it’s not *kids’* overuse but *parents’* overuse that’s the real issue) to drive many parents to strive for a better balance. However, if you haven’t already—or if you’ve tried and are now ready to recommit—the holidays are the perfect time to model good habits, even if it’s for the short-term when everyone is together. Children of all ages closely observe how their parents use technology—and the value they place on it. A recent ASHA-Read Aloud 15 MINUTES national [survey](#) found that 41% of parents of young children said their kids sometimes (or more often) ask them to put down their devices and interact with them. Show your children that the holidays are a time to power down devices and recharge the family connection. Spend more time talking and listening.
2. **Plan Activities to Promote Togetherness.** Sure, the holiday season is chaotic (and you may feel like you don’t need yet *another* activity), but Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, Hanukkah, and New Year’s Day (among others) often mean lots of indoor together time. Is everyone retreating to their own corners or rooms, occupied by their phones or tablets? Make this time count! A family board game or puzzle challenge, watching a new or classic holiday movie together and discussing it, or trying out a new cookie recipe or Pinterest project are just a few ideas. Whatever it is, think through some options in advance so you don’t default to solitary tech time.
3. **Add a Holiday Addendum to Your Family Technology Plan.** Many experts suggest creating a family technology plan to document rules/parameters around technology use—ideally that all members of the household abide by (resources [here](#) and [here](#)). However, the holidays may call for some changes—given the special circumstances this time affords. Parents may have less pressure to be online for work than during other times of the year. Kids have a break from school, daily homework, and after-school activities. The family doesn’t need to be tethered to devices in order to function! Spend a whole day without your phones (go to the movies, go ice skating, go out to dinner—leave the devices behind!). It may be the only time you can do so, and after some initial griping, most will find that they enjoy the temporary break and conversations that result.
4. **Stash Devices in a Designated Spot.** If you don’t have a central charging station or “home” for all devices (preferably near the door or somewhere away from the household hubs such as the kitchen or living room), this is a great time to create one. Ideally, this is used year-round, but during the holidays is a great time to start. With phones and tablets “out of sight, out of mind” (and out of hearing range from every incoming notification), the pull to constantly and mindlessly check devices is reduced.

5. **Host a Tech-Free Gathering, With Advanced Notice of Expectations.** If you are hosting a large family meal (Thanksgiving dinner, New Year's Day brunch) that you want to keep tech-free—particularly if this involves people who don't live with you—make your tech expectations clear up front. If your kids aren't allowed to use devices, but their cousins come over and won't stop watching YouTube videos, this can be frustrating. Remember, it doesn't just have to be a holiday dinner. Consider hosting a tech-free holiday party for the neighborhood or friends. Tech-free events are getting more popular, and people are willing to part with them (some restaurants and concert/comedy venues are taking this approach). Notice how much more time you spend having interesting conversations. If you want to capture the moment, take pictures at the very beginning or end of the gathering (or use a Polaroid, which is making a comeback).
6. **Be Realistic, Especially With Older Kids.** A dinner is one thing, but a full week without mobile devices may be ambitious, especially for older kids—many of whom rely on social media sites to interact with friends. Try to set realistic expectations and rules. The idea is to build together time, not deliver a punishment. Suggest activities to connect and communicate as alternatives.
7. **Incorporate Technology in Meaningful Ways.** Use technology in ways that foster rather than hinder connections. Grandparents live far away? Use Facetime or Skype to allow them to join in as kids open presents on Christmas morning or while lighting the menorah or kinara. Go through online photos from the year, and create a photo book or a calendar together. Talk about all the experiences represented there, places visited, and family and friends included.
8. **Gift Technology Mindfully—Some Strings Attached.** Kids of all ages may have tech devices on their holiday wish lists. If you are planning to give the gift of technology, make it a point to set some ground rules *at the time of gifting*. This is the ideal opportunity to talk about a family technology plan, your expectations around tech use, and using tech safely. It's also a great time to talk about some larger, overarching tech values—such as prioritizing “real-world” connections over technology.
9. **Use Tech to Limit Tech Use.** [Apple](#) now offers a series of features designed to help people manage their tech time (such as Screen Time, which analyzes time spent online, as well as enhancements to Do Not Disturb and additional options to control notifications). Features are available as well for [Android devices](#). There is also numerous apps designed for this purpose. You can challenge yourself and your family to see who can get the lowest screen time numbers for the week, or who can reduce the number of hours the most from the first week to the last week in a month.
10. **Start the New Year Off Right.** Consider a New Year's resolution as a family around everyone's technology use. Make a written commitment. You're in this together!

Want more tips and information about embracing healthy use of technology—and prioritizing interpersonal connection and communication in the age of technology? Visit ASHA's [www.communicationandtech.org](http://www.communicationandtech.org) to learn more.

## Angle 2: Gift-giving tips

### 6 Tips for Parents When Gifting Tech Devices

Tech gifts on your kid's holiday wish list? You may have concerns about opening the Pandora's Box of tech use, particularly if this is your child's first device. Here are some tips for setting the appropriate tone from the start, from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA):

1. **Do Your Homework.** Talk to other parents, friends, neighbors—and do plenty of online research before purchasing a product. *Consumer Reports* and Common Sense Media offer detailed ratings and recommendations, as do many tech magazines and websites. Consider the types of activities your child will be doing on their device, as well as your own priorities—such as available parental controls.
2. **Get Acquainted With the Device/Product First.** Many devices for kids include a wide assortment of parental controls. Take time to familiarize yourself with the device and test out controls yourself before giving it to your child (this probably means ruining the pristine packing, which only lasts a minute after your child gets a hold of it anyway). Demonstrate to your child that you know how to use the device.
3. **Set Ground Rules.** The ideal time to make a family technology agreement that covers parameters for when, where, and how devices are to be used is when you give the gift. You may want to cover your approach to passwords (do you want to know the passwords to all their accounts?) as well as how technology should fit into overall daily life (i.e., it should not replace outdoor/physical activity time nor family time). Tee up conversations about the importance of balance with everything—not only tech use. Even if you don't formalize rules through an agreement, make your expectations clear.
4. **Think Beyond Time Restrictions.** With the exception of very young children, restricting the total amount of time spent on technology is not necessarily the best approach. The “ideal” time may vary based on the individual child, the types of activities the child engages in while using tech (passive vs. active), and a variety of other factors. Consider other approaches, such as setting up tech-free zones in the home (e.g., dinner table, bedrooms).
5. **Make Time for Co-Viewing/Use.** Devices are great at keeping kids occupied while parents get other tasks done. However, it's also easy to over-rely on them. Try to carve out daily time for using technology *with* your child. Ask them to show and explain to you what they're doing online, play a video game with them, or watch what they're viewing on YouTube with them. Your interest can get the conversation and connection flowing, will give you a better sense of what kids are doing on devices, and give you a heads up on any potential red flags.
6. **Don't Unintentionally Over-Value Tech Time.** Some parents report success with having children “earn” their device time, whether it's after they complete their homework, do chores, or spend a certain amount of time doing some other activity desired by parents. But this also may inadvertently send the signal that everything else in life is like eating your vegetables and technology is the dessert—even things that should be fun, such as outdoor activity. This may be something to consider.

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### Angle 3: Prime opportunities for communication/interaction during holidays

#### 'Tis the Season for Conversation, Communication, and Connection

##### *Making the Most of the Bonding Opportunities the Holidays Bring*

The holiday season is supposed to be all about family time, but true bonding can be lost in the holiday shuffle—whether it's the stress of seemingly endless holiday prep, constant interference from our mobile devices, or something else. Here are some prime opportunities to maximize conversation, communication, and connection this holiday season, from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA):

1. **In the Kitchen**—Kids can make cooking a bit more complicated, but it's also a great opportunity to build vocabulary, learn math concepts, talk, bond, and just have fun. Tackle a side dish together or a new cookie recipe for the holidays. Added bonus: It's very difficult to use a tablet (or do anything else!) when you're getting your hands dirty in the kitchen.
2. **On the Road (or in the Air)**—Do your holiday plans include some extended travel time, in the car or in the air? More than any other time, parents can feel that tablets or smartphones with headphones are an absolute necessity for their kids. While they certainly can come in handy on a long flight if your child is complaining or disrupting others, there's no need for a preemptive strike. There is so much to talk about—the different surroundings, where you are going, and what you are going to do when you get there. The same is true of car time. Many adults have fond memories of playing the license plate game or goofing off with siblings during road trips. Not to mention the benefits of boredom and allowing kids time to use their imagination. Try to avoid defaulting to tech immediately—and talk instead!
3. **Around the Dinner Table**—Sure, families should strive for family dinners year-round. But during the holidays, everyone may have a few days (or even a week or longer!) of a reprieve from common barriers to family dinners, such as late afternoon work meetings or sports practices/games. Make the most of this time together!
4. **During Gift Wrapping or Card Writing**—This is an activity that often falls to parents, but kids can participate in wrapping gifts for cousins or other relatives. Again, this is a great time to keep your hands busy (device-free!) while talking, listening to holiday music, and enjoying each other's company. The same is true for writing—and stuffing and stamping—holiday cards.
5. **While Volunteering**—This is a great way to connect as a family while doing something to help others. Even younger children can participate in picking out gifts for a holiday toy drive or nonperishable food items for a food bank. Family-friendly walks and fun runs as well as a host of other options are available as well, year round but especially around the holidays. Your experience may be something you talk about together for a long time—and is yet another way to prioritize people over objects this season.