



Safe Online Standards

IMPROVING DIGITAL MENTAL HEALTH

GUIDE: Making Healthier Choices Online

Supporting balance, boundaries, and well-being

Being online is part of everyday life. Social media, games, and messaging help people stay connected, entertained, and informed. At the same time, what we see and how much time we spend online can affect how we feel, our energy, our sleep, and our stress.

Big Picture

Being online can be positive, and it can also take a toll. **Both can be true.**

This guide is here to help teens and families notice what's going on and make small adjustments when something doesn't feel right.

What This Guide Is (and isn't)

This isn't about controlling technology. It's about building skills to use it in healthier ways

- ☐ *This isn't about controlling technology or taking it away.*
- ☐ *It's about building skills to use technology in healthier, more intentional ways.*
- ☐ *It's not about perfection, it's about awareness.*

Everyone's experience is different

Everyone experiences the online world differently. What feels fine for one person might feel like too much for someone else.

This guide isn't here to tell you what to do. It's here to help you notice what's working for you, and what might not be.

Key Takeaway

There's no one-size-fits-all. What matters is how you feel.

Paying attention to how time online affects your day can help you make choices that feel healthier and more balanced.

Notice how being online affects you (Teen Reflection)

A helpful place to start is simply noticing how being online affects your mood and stress.

Some apps might help you feel relaxed or connected. Others might leave you feeling tired, anxious, or distracted. Things like nonstop notifications, endless scrolling, or pressure to keep up can make it harder to focus or unwind.

Mood Check

Ask yourself:

- Do I feel better or worse after using this app?
- More calm or more stressed?

Normalizing Note

These reactions are common. Feeling drained doesn't mean you're doing something wrong, it means your brain is responding to stimulation. It can also help to notice when being online starts to interfere with other parts of life. This might show up as trouble sleeping, difficulty focusing on school, spending less time on things you enjoy offline, or feeling irritable when you put your phone down.



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A Few Signs It Might Be Time to Adjust

- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling distracted or unfocused
- Less interest in offline activities
- Feeling irritable without your phone

Reframe

These aren't failures. They're signals. Information your body and mind are giving you.

Small Changes Can Make a Real Difference

Making healthier choices online doesn't mean changing everything at once. Small, thoughtful steps often help more than big, sudden changes.

Small Steps That Can Help

- Take short screen breaks
- Turn off non-essential notifications
- Set phone-free times (meals, bedtime, homework)
- Stop scrolling when it starts to feel draining

Teen Tip You don't have to quit an app. Sometimes changing *how* you use it is enough.

Supporting healthy habits at home (For Families)

Families play an important role in supporting healthy digital habits. What helps most is open, judgment-free conversation.

Caregivers don't need to monitor everything or have all the answers. Support works best when it feels like teamwork, not surveillance.

Conversation Starter "How has being online been feeling for you lately?"

For Parents & Caregivers

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Conversation Starter

"How has being online been feeling for you lately?"

Why This Actually Helps

Making healthier choices online is about noticing patterns and responding in ways that genuinely help.

When teens understand how digital use affects them and feel supported by the adults around them, they build self-awareness, confidence, and stronger digital resilience.

Bottom Line

The goal isn't less technology. It's helping teens use technology in ways that support balance, well-being, and real-life connection.