

How to Help Kids With ADHD Manage Screen Time

By the Understood Team

Lots of kids have trouble managing screen time and knowing when it's time to unplug. But ADHD can make it even harder for kids to make good decisions about technology. Learn about common trouble spots and ways you can help.

Trouble Spot: Time Management

The challenge: ADHD can make it hard to keep track of time. Kids who struggle with time management can spend hours and hours in front of a screen without realizing how much time has passed.

How you can help: Avoid saying things like “Five more minutes.” Instead, learn how long it takes your child to complete specific aspects of games and social media. Then talk together about what your child wants to accomplish and set the stopping point based on those goals.

That allows you to give warnings based on natural stopping points, like “You need to log off at the end of this round.”

It also helps to agree ahead of time on what kids will do once they've reached those stopping points. That could be activities like cooking, crafting, or something physical like jumping rope. Make sure to praise your child for logging off promptly and without a lot of complaining.

Trouble Spot: Impulse Control

The challenge: Kids with ADHD are more likely to engage in risky behavior, like watching inappropriate videos or sexting.

How you can help: Keep TVs and computers in a common area, like the living room, to make it harder for your child to spend too much time online or engage in risky behavior. And make it clear you'll be doing surprise inspections on your child's phone and other devices. Learn how to monitor kids' online activity without spying on them.

Trouble Spot: Difficulty Sleeping

The challenge: Bedtime can be challenging for kids with ADHD. Being online at night can make it even tougher for them to wind down.

How you can help: Try to end screen time at least an hour before your child goes to bed. To ensure that happens, try moving smartphones and other devices out of the bedroom at night.

Trouble Spot: Getting Distracted

The challenge: All the bells and whistles online make it hard for kids with ADHD to stay focused on things like chores or homework. And when they are online, kids with ADHD can get “lost” in a game and forget they had those tasks to do in the first place.

How you can help: Avoid having the TV on in the background during homework time. And if the homework space happens to be in a busy room in the house, headphones or earplugs could help. Keep in mind, too, that just because your child is on the computer doesn't mean the homework is actually getting done. Check out apps to help kids manage online distractions, like games and social media, until homework is complete.

Create a Screen Time Contract

Making a screen time contract is a great way for you and your child to set boundaries together.

Brainstorm together so that the contract:

- Builds in time for homework
- Includes ideas on stopping points and transitions
- Has firm guidelines about the types of apps and sites that are and are not acceptable

Working together on a contract can help you feel more like teammates and less like opponents when it comes to managing screen time.

Use the attached cell phone contract as a starting point. And once you've both agreed to it and signed it, keep it someplace handy so you can both review it regularly.