

OCMH guidance compiled from the Child Mind Institute and American Academy of Pediatrics

Digital media surrounds both children and adults. Media use, especially social media, should be scaffolded by age. Consider these helpful guidelines for children of all ages. In all cases, having open conversations about what kids are viewing is key.

Very young children – ages 0-4

- Avoid TV and entertainment for children under 18 months.
- Limit media use to video conversations with relatives.
- If families do choose to introduce media at this age, it should be educational programming, and parents should watch with their children to answer any questions they might have.
- For children ages 2-5, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting media consumption to an hour of high-quality programming with parents watching alongside their children prompting discussions and asking questions.
- Parents and adults should set an example. Don't check your messages at meal time and look at people when they are talking to you (not at your phone). Remember that your children are always watching you, and young children notice everything — that's how they learn.
- Don't underestimate the value of traditional toys, open spaces, and free play.
- Leave the tablet at home.

Grade school age kids – ages 5-11

- Watch things together. Point out when you see things that don't align with your values.
- Set sensible boundaries on how much screen time is appropriate for your child. Limit screen use before bedtime.
- Designate media-free spaces, like bedrooms and the dinner table. Establishing (and enforcing) these limits from a young age teaches kids to set boundaries and be healthy media consumers.
- Be discerning. Determine what is quality screen time and what isn't. Look out for things that are age-appropriate, engage your child's imagination, and have the right values.
- Understand popular video games and their content. Some are cooperative games, others can be violent. Set limits on gaming.
- Don't make screens the reward.
- Encourage healthy behaviors and activities that don't involve a screen and model this.
- Be prepared for them to discover porn which kids can easily stumble upon. Curiosity is often a big motivator, so don't be shy about having some frank, [developmentally appropriate conversations about sex](#).

Tweens and teens – age 12+

- Keep modeling healthy tech habits including screen-free bedrooms, family meals, and bedtime routines.
- Encourage privacy and enable privacy settings. Make sure your child is very careful about digital privacy. Research privacy settings with them and make sure they understand when something is public, private, or somewhere in the middle, and how that should affect what they post.

- Yes to friending, no to spying. If your child is on social media, follow or friend them, and monitor their page. But don't go through text messages unless there is cause for concern.
- Make it clear that naked pictures are a bad idea and explain why. Sometimes kids think sharing photos is a way to build trust, but it can do the opposite just as easily.
- Help your child curate their social media feed to content that is interesting and uplifting.
- Texting can be tricky. Warn kids that it's easy for people to misinterpret messages when they aren't hearing the tone of your child's voice or seeing the expression on their face.

Resource: [Child Mind Institute – Media Guidelines for Kids of All Ages](#)