Digital Wellbeing:
how to use technology intentionally

Theme 2024-25

We want our students to be able to use digital tech appropriately, intentionally and healthily

Introduction to the powerpoint information

- Smartphone use and the impact on young people has been in the news for several months and the debate around phones in schools is ongoing.

- It is now recognised that smartphones pose **twin risks** to young people;

 - one is around **safeguarding and exposure to inappropriate and harmful content** online.

 - The second risk is around the **impact on concentration, sleep, academic achievement, habituation and addiction.** Young people spend more of their day away from school and so they need to understand the risks to ensure their usage is appropriate, intentional and healthy, when not subject to formal restrictions on their phone use, and other devices such as gaming consoles

- Ultimately the children will be managing their own phone use when not subject to school rules.

Parents and school working together with our children and young people to enable them to use their phones appropriately, intentionally and healthily

- This powerpoint will focus on the second risk.

- It is designed to support parents and families to;

  - empower you in setting boundaries and routines around digital tech use, especially phones

  - to be able to have informed discussions with your child about what is appropriate, intentional and healthy tech use for when you choose to allow them to have a Smartphone

- To achieve this, parents and school need to work together, with the children, so that there is shared accountability around setting boundaries, and shared responsibility for supporting the children to manage their own phone use

We may refer to phones in the ppt but the guidance on boundary setting applies to all digital tech or screen use in the family

Acknowledging where we are…

- For our children who already have a Smartphone, the genie is already out of the bottle, so how do we reset manage access to something they may already have had limitless access to?

- Banning smartphones entirely is unrealistic

  – managing access to phones by age or time restrictions is doable

- As adults we also use phones in front of and around our children –perhaps not with the best habits?

  - potentially poses challenges for our own phone use

- Smartphones can allow us to do amazing things

- Is parental worry around phones more about the harmful and damaging content rather than teaching our children to use their phones appropriately, intentionally and healthily?

- Why might parents feel comfortable setting boundaries about, for example, going out in the evening, or discussions around appropriateness, intentionality and health of a healthy diet but lack confidence in doing the same around phone use?

What have we done with the students in 2024-25?

- Audit of phone use – encouraged students to look at the app use and screen time.
- What prolonged and sustained phone use does to our brains (dopamine changes), our sleep patterns, our ability to concentrate, our social interactions and our anxiety levels
- What intentional phone use means
- Tips on how to use phones intentionally
- Suggesting that we need to learn how to be OK with boredom and delayed gratification
- Asked students to write a digital wellbeing guide
- Each student made a pledge for themselves

We posed this question to students –
Would you give as a gift, or ask for something that you know…

- Will have a negative impact on your mental health

- Was deliberately made to be addictive

- Releases certain chemicals in your brain that…a small amount of dopamine," Buttimer explains. "Dopamine motivates us to take action and each time we hear a notification, we check our device. The problem is this dopamine boost is temporary and leads to a letdown chemically altering our brains

- Has a negative impact on your sleep

- Has a negative impact on your ability to concentrate for a long time

- Changes your brain structure leads to a decrease in grey matter in the brain, which is responsible for processing information and decision-making

- Makes you more anxious

- Takes up a lot of your time

- The first thing you use in the morning and the last think you use at night

- Means you do less exercise and get less fresh air

- Is in your thoughts all the time

- Affects your interpersonal relationships

- Affects your ability to communicate verbally effectively

- Affects your memory

- Has no safeguards or very few protections

And we also know the new digital world has a downside…

There is provable evidence that

1. **Smartphones rewire our brains**, especially teenagers and young people under 25.

It **affects the dopamine levels** in our brains, which in turn **affects our ability to concentrate**, which **affects our school work**. Studies show that excessive smartphone use has negative impacts on academic performance. Children at schools with effective smartphone bans get GCSE's 1-2 grades higher than schools who do not. [the same is true for excessive gaming]

 It also **affects our sleep**, which affects our health in all sorts of ways. It can lead to addictive behaviours, so we find it hard to not be with our phone

2. Content on social media **affects our mood negatively**

3. **Content online can be malicious, harmful and exploitative**. It is not properly safeguarded and it does not take many clicks or swipes to access content that is not good for you. 90% of girls and 50% of boys say they're sent explicit content they didn't want to see

4. **Smartphones affect our relationships** - Smartphones are experience blockers, distracting you from engaging in the real world. The average UK 12-year old now spends 29 hours a week – equivalent to a part-time job – on their smartphone. This leaves little time for the real-world activities and relationships that enable us to learn the essential life skills we need to transition into adulthood. The average daily time that teens spend with friends has plummeted by 65% since 2010

Is your phone your boss?

There are three reasons why most people find they can't put their phones down and use them ***unintentionally***

1. Addictive behaviours
2. Boredom
3. Habit

# How can I improve the intentionality of my family's tech use?

The next few slides guide you through how to establish new routines and boundaries around tech use in your family. This will make the boundaries personal and appropriate for your situation with different age children, co-parents, different work patterns and demands on family time.

There are 5 broad steps:

1. Gather ideas about what your family likes to do

2. Draw out from this what your family values are e.g. shared time

3. Work through the four questions about current screen time use

4. Make a screen time agreement, which will include how you may change the environment around tech use and / or the routines around tech use

5. Prepare how you will respond to the inevitable kickback and the implementation dip of your new family routine

Step 1: What do we want our family to be known for?

- Use resource pack page 2 to help you discuss some ideas
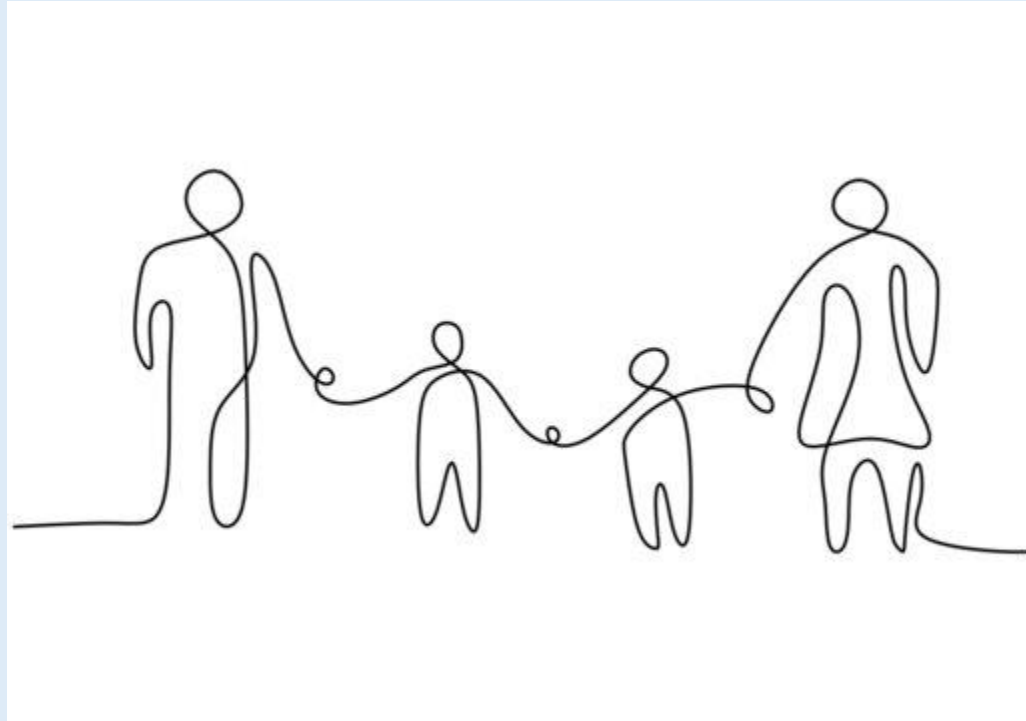
Step 2 - What do we value as a family?

1. Look at your list and see if you can elicit what these things mean about your family in terms of what you value.

Be curious, not judgmental

(Walt Whitman) (Ted Lasso)

Step 3 – complete the four boxes on the screen time agreement

Use resource pack page 1

This is an audit of current screen / digital use to help you make decisions about a healthier balance / boundaries for everyone's devices

Step 4 – complete a new screen time agreement

Use resource pack pages 2, 3 and 4 to write your own screen time agreement. Pages 3 & 4 is the agreement –some ideas are already written there as a suggestion

We've got the agreement – plain sailing?

The agreement is the first step in the process.

The next crucial piece will involve considering:

1. How you will modify your environment to support the agreement working
2. How you can tweak your family routines to support the agreement working
3. Having scripts prepared to handle the inevitable kick-back when our children want to change / end / bin the agreement
4. What resources to have to hand to support with the agreement working

Changing the digital environment

- Where will you put your devices when not being used?

- Which rooms will stay screen free?

- What could you put in screen free rooms to encourage creativity, connection and calm?

Remember to start small – changing one thing at a time will over time have a lasting and powerful effect.

Changing the digital routines

- Where will you put your devices when not being used?

- How might you replace digital tech with analogue tech to change the routine e.g. alarm clock instead of phone

- How could you use screen-free time to encourage creativity, connection and calm?

- What bedtime will you give to devices and how will you model this?

Remember to start small – changing one thing at a time will over time have a lasting and powerful effect.

Anticipate and prepare for resistance:
A script from a family therapist

See resource pack page 5 for an example conversation. This one is about sharing with your children a decision to delay social media use until the age of 16.

Reflect on how you could adapt this script to discuss your decision to limit the use of screens in your home and in your family's new routines

Resources to counter boredom!

There are many resources out there for parents who are wanting to create deeper connections and boost social times with their families. Here are just a few we have come across:

OMG I'm so bored! The Activity Book for Teens

100 Screen free ways to beat boredom

Busy ideas for bored kids (travel edition, outside edition, travel edition, artist edition, rainy day edition)

101 Things for kids to do screen free

Tales – conversational starters for talking as a family

What can you do to only use your tech **intentionally**?

1. **Know what your use is** – journal this or use the phone settings to find out when you are most likely to use your phone unintentionally – time of day, which apps etc

2. Break the HABIT by setting up clear ROUTINES

a) Morning: use an alarm clock not your phone to wake you up. Do not use for phone for 30 minutes after you get up. Set the Do Not Disturb mode to that time

b) When at home: avoid carrying your phone with you round the house. Give it a "place" in your house, that is NOT your bedroom. Charge it there

c) Simply don't bring your phone to school

d) Agree family rules around when the whole family will not use their phones e.g meal times, not when watching a film

e) Put your phone "to bed" in it's place 1 hour before you go to bed. Set the DO Not Disturb mode to that time

What can you do to only use your tech **intentionally**?

3. **Break the addiction**

a)   Make your phone less appealing – set the screen to grey or set the most addictive apps to grey

b)   Make it harder to get to your addictive apps – remove them from your home screen, turn notifications off,

log out of your social media each time

a)   Delete all unnecessary apps – if it is not adding to you life, remove it

b)   Only access social media via a laptop or tablet and delete them from your phone

c)   Set time limits on your apps

d)   Go Cold Turkey – give up your phone entirely for one or two weeks, then when you go back to it, use it only intentionally

e)   Get the support of family and friends to help you stick to your plan

4. Find different solutions to boredom

a)   Understand that boredom is not a negative feeling. It can lead to creative. Don't be afraid of not having anything to do

sometimes. Let your mind wander without your phone

b) Give yourself some uninterrupted focus time every day doing something that does not involve any digital tech

c)   Do exercise – it helps rebalance dopamine levels

d)   Tie a ribbon or string round your phone when you are not using it. Taking it off will slow you down and maybe stop

yourself reaching for the phone when you are simply bored

c)   Meet up with friends, don't just DM

d)   Read real books not e- books

What our students said should go into a Digital Wellbeing Guide

To tackle addictive behaviours

- Set a time limit – either for total time or for particular Apps.
- Set family rules so everyone does it the same
- Make the screen b&w so less interesting.
- Buy phones with lower capacity (not the latest model)
- Block or delete certain apps.
- Turn off notifications
- Set parental controls.

To set up new routines

- Put your phone "to bed" in its **place 1 hour before you go to bed**. Set the DO Not Disturb mode to that time
- Keep the Phone / charge the phone in a different room
- Don't bring phone to school

To change habits

- Do exercise – it helps rebalance dopamine levels**, go outside more and without phone**
- Meet up with friends, don't just DM

Resources

For adults

- [Watch Swiped: The School That Banned Smartphones | Stream free on Channel 4](#)
- [Panorama - Can We Live Without Our Phones? - BBC iPlayer](#)
- [Swiped The School That Banned Smart Phones - Lessons For Parents Plus What They Missed](#)
- [https://www.smartphonefreechildhood.org/](#)
- [1000 Hours Outside](#) – podcast and website about doing alternative activities
- [How mobile phones have changed our brains - BBC Future](#)
- [The Effect of Cell Phones on Dopamine in the Brain | Momentous Institute](#)
- [Big Life Journal: Growth Mindset for Kids & Teens](#) –also on Instagram

Books

- **How to break up with your phone** by Catherine Anne Price (on breaking your own habit)
- **The Anxious Generation** by Jonathan Haidt

To use with or for your children

- [What effects do mobile phones have on children and young people's mental health – Compass](#)
- 'The Amazing Generation: your guide to fun and freedom in a screen-filled world' by Jonathan Haidt and Catherine Anne Price (available to pre-order December 2025)

Available advice on screen time

- [Children and technology: Age-appropriate usage advice | NSPCC](#) – general guidance

- [Common Sense Media: Age-Based Media Reviews for Families | Common Sense Media](#) – helps parents know the recommended ages for content (not screen time)

- OSF healthcare are based in Illinois USA

- Drawing information from a variety of sites, including NHS sites in the UK **The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends**

  - No screen time for children 0-2 years old

  - Up to 1 hour of screen time a day for children 2-4 years old

  - Up to 2 hours of screen time a day for children aged 5-17

- [vodafone.co.uk/newscentre/smart-living/digital-parenting/screen-time-and-your-family-a-guide-to-what-works-and-what-doesnt/](#)

SCREEN TIME:
Recommended limits for kids

UNDER 2 YEARS OLD
Zero screen time, except for video chatting with family or friends

2-5 YEARS OLD
No more than one hour per day co-viewing with a parent or sibling

5-17 YEARS OLD
Generally no more than two hours per day, except for homework

OSF HEALTHCARE