

Parent's Guide to iPhone Screen Time

SETTING HEALTHY DIGITAL LIMITS FOR YOUR TEEN

This guide walks you through iPhone's built-in Screen Time tools — so you can set consistent, meaningful limits that support your teen's wellbeing.

Designed for iPhones running iOS 12 or later · All steps are completed from your own device

SETUP

01 Set Up Family Sharing

Before setting any limits, create a Family Sharing group so you can manage your teen's iPhone remotely from your own device.

- 1 Open **Settings** on your iPhone.
- 2 Tap your name at the top of the screen.
- 3 Tap **Family**, then **Continue** and follow the on-screen instructions.
- 4 Tap the **Add Member** button to add your teen.
- 5 If your teen has an Apple Account, tap **Invite People**. If not, tap **Create an Account for a Child** and follow the steps.

NOTE

You will need your teen's date of birth to create a Child Account. Apple uses this to apply age-appropriate default settings automatically.

02 Turn On Screen Time

Once your teen is part of your Family Sharing group:

- 1 Go to **Settings** on your iPhone and tap **Screen Time**.
- 2 Under **Family**, tap your teen's name.
- 3 Tap **App & Website Activity**, then **Turn On App & Website Activity**.
- 4 Tap **Use Screen Time Passcode** and create a 4-digit passcode — do not share this with your teen.

IMPORTANT

If you set up Screen Time through Family Sharing and forget the passcode, you can reset it using your device passcode, Touch ID, or Face ID.

DAILY LIMITS

03 Set App Time Limits

Limit how much time per day your teen spends on specific categories of apps.

- 1 In Screen Time, tap **App Limits**, then **Add Limit**.
- 2 Select the categories you want to limit (e.g., Social Networking, Games, Entertainment).
- 3 Set the daily time allowed and tap **Add** to save.

| APP CATEGORY | RECOMMENDED DAILY LIMIT |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Social Media (TikTok, Instagram) | 30 – 60 minutes |
| Games | 1 hour |
| Entertainment (YouTube, Netflix) | 1 – 2 hours |
| Total recreational screen time | 2 hours maximum |

04 Schedule Downtime

Downtime blocks the phone during specific hours — such as overnight or during school.

- 1 In Screen Time, tap **Downtime** and turn it on.
- 2 Choose the days and hours when the iPhone will be blocked.

SUGGESTED SCHEDULE

Nighttime: 9:00 PM – 7:00 AM to protect sleep. School hours: 8:00 AM – 3:00 PM. During Downtime, only apps you approve (such as Phone and Messages) remain available.

CONTENT & PRIVACY

05 Block Inappropriate Content

- 1 In Screen Time, tap **Content & Privacy Restrictions** and turn on the toggle.
 - 2 Tap **Content Restrictions** to set movie/TV ratings (e.g., PG-13), filter explicit music and podcasts, and enable **Limit Adult Websites** for web browsing.
 - 3 Under **iTunes & App Store Purchases**, set **Don't Allow** so your teen cannot install new apps without your permission.
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06 Prevent Turning Off Location

These steps lock location settings so your teen cannot disable them without your Screen Time passcode.

- 1 Go to **Settings** → **Screen Time** → [teen's name] → **Content & Privacy Restrictions** .
- 2 Tap **Privacy Changes** → **Location Services** and set **Don't Allow Changes** . This grays out the Location toggle on your teen's phone.
- 3 In the same screen, tap **Share My Location** and set **Don't Allow** to prevent them from stopping location sharing through **Allow Find My**.
- 4 Open **Find My** app on your phone and confirm your teen's location is being shared with you under **People** tab.

WHAT YOU CAN PREVENT

- ✓ Turning off Location Services
- ✓ Stopping sharing in Find My
- ✓ Changing location privacy per app
- ✓ Adding unknown contacts to location sharing

WHAT YOU CANNOT PREVENT

- Turning the phone off entirely
- Turning on Airplane Mode
- Leaving the phone at home
- Blocking signal with a case or wrap

MOST IMPORTANTLY

Pair these technical controls with a clear family agreement. Make location sharing a condition of having the phone, not just a setting you enforce silently.

07 View Your Teen's Usage Report

- 1 Go to **Settings** → **Screen Time** and tap your teen's name.
- 2 You will see a daily and weekly summary of usage by app and category.

TIP

Review the report together with your teen once a week. This opens a positive conversation about phone use without it feeling like a confrontation.

Using Screen Time as a Behavioral Tool

Screen time limits can be woven into a positive support plan. The idea is simple: more screen time is earned through positive behaviors, and less is the natural consequence when those behaviors don't happen. This works best when the rules are clear, consistent, and agreed upon in advance.

KEY PRINCIPLE

This works best as a motivational tool, not a punishment. Frame it as your teen earning privileges rather than losing them — and always discuss the plan ahead of time so expectations are clear.

School Attendance

Phone access can be a meaningful motivator for teens who struggle with attendance.

| BEHAVIOR | SCREEN TIME REWARD | SCREEN TIME CONSEQUENCE |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| Attends all classes for the day | Full daily screen time (e.g., 2 hrs) | — |
| Misses 1 or more classes without excuse | — | Reduced to 30 min; social media blocked |
| Full week of attendance | Bonus screen time on weekend (+1 hr) | — |
| Refuses to attend school | — | Essentials only (calls & messages) |

Mental Health Goals

Screen time can also support goals like attending therapy or completing daily check-ins.

| GOAL | SCREEN TIME REWARD | IF GOAL NOT MET |
|---|---|---|
| Attends scheduled therapy | +30 min screen time that day | No change to existing limits |
| Completes daily mood check-in with parent | Access to 1 blocked app for the evening | App remains blocked |
| Practices a coping skill (walk, journaling) | +15 – 30 min screen time | No change |
| Misses 2+ therapy sessions in a row | — | Reduce social media to 15 min/day; review plan with therapist |

A Few Reminders

- Always explain the plan to your teen in advance — no surprises.
- Keep the rules simple and easy to track (1 — 3 goals at a time).
- Celebrate progress, even small steps. A partial win still deserves acknowledgment.
- Avoid taking away the phone entirely as a first response — start with small reductions.
- Reassess the plan every 2 — 4 weeks and adjust based on what is working.
- If your teen is working with a therapist, share this plan with them so it supports their treatment.