

As your child grows they strive for their own independence, however every child likes to have boundaries, even if it is to push it as far as it can go! Here we look at some top tips for setting boundaries with your child to create a healthy online /offline balance.

Joint decisions

Include your child in the discussion, ask what their views are and what they believe is an acceptable amount of time to be spending online. Look at all the areas you want them to think about to get their point of view and come to an agreement together. They will be more likely to stick to it if they feel they have been included as it is letting them have some control.

Time spent gaming

Think about all the different uses of the online world. Rather than allowing them X amount of time a day, think about how much time they spend online and for what purpose.

Many use online methods for homework. Most schools set work, projects, research and communicate via apps. The amount of time they are online for studying should be a separate issue. Most young people watch videos, box sets, YouTube videos etc for pleasure and as a way to unwind, just as they would the TV. These tend to be a set length of time although many people can binge watch a box set into the early hours. One thing to note is the blue light coming from the screen displays on computers and phones which can affect their sleep. So, whilst they may want to watch something before bed, get them to think about a TV rather than a computer or phone screen to help their eyes and ensure a good rest.

To keep it simple we will focus on how long they can game online.

Agree on an amount of time you both think is acceptable to game online on a school day and at the weekend. During our research, when we asked young people how long they play and what they consider to be a healthy amount of time to play the times differed a lot! Most young people recognised that they probably play too long so whilst they may try and push their luck they will be sensible in deciding on a reasonable time.

Before you game...

Can they come straight home and game straight away? Do they need to complete their homework or certain chores first? Look at what they need to do each day and use this as a bargaining tool. For example, once they have completed their homework they can have X amount of time gaming before dinner.

No game time zones

As mentioned above, the blue light from the computer screens or tablets can interfere with sleep so think about what times they should turn their gadgets off. Have a healthy amount of time between finishing play and bedtime.

You can agree they leave their consoles downstairs or if they have their consoles in their room you can set timers on each individual device to turn off the internet at a certain time until a certain time. This can help prevent your child staying up all night playing resulting in feeling tired or fatigued and not being able to concentrate at school.

To encourage healthy eating practices, look at introducing no phones at the table policy. This is for everyone in the family and helps your child's social interaction on a face to face basis. As good as it is that they communicate with friends whilst playing sometimes they can struggle socially on a face to face basis.

Consistent messages and approaches

Ensure that both parents are in agreement with the boundaries and all family members are aware of the boundaries too. Keep these same routines to provide a consistent approach. You may adjust the timings during the weekend or holidays but it is important that you keep the down time before bedtime etc.

Allow for countdowns and time after gaming.

In our document [responding to emotions](#) we looked at why a child likes to game and how to recognise their emotions when they finish playing. Allowing for time for your child to regulate their emotions after playing online is important. They may be angry or sad and they may need some time alone to calm down before you need them to do something else so allow for this when deciding how long they can play for.

For example if you have stopped your child's play because dinner is ready they may get angry and the dinner experience will not be as pleasant as if you have stopped them earlier and allowed them time to regulate their emotions before dinner is ready.

On this note, one of the biggest issues young people said they had with their parents was around their parents understanding of the game and how they end their play.

If your child is in a middle of a live game or a game that requires completing a level or task to progress and you have asked them to finish immediately they will lose what they have been working towards, hence why they feel angry or annoyed.

When setting limits find out what type of games they are playing and how long it takes to play. For example, If each game is 30 minutes they can play X amount of times. If it takes 2 hours to progress to the next level, this might be better for weekend play rather than a quick go before tea. This can prevent those issues arising.

[For information on game lengths and style of play see Secondary – Gaming – Information – Game Briefs](#)

Some children may prefer a visual reminder so setting an alarm to monitor how long they have left to play can help.

Location

Decide on where they can have their games consoles/tablets. Having it in public areas of the house creates a set area where they can game, you can monitor what is happening and allows you to monitor group chats for their safety.

Healthy balances

Think about what else your child needs to take into consideration as well as gaming. To create a healthy balance, mix things up and ensure a good range of activities. Other things to take into consideration include;

Physical time – Get some exercise in. If they are sat for a long time gaming their body is seated in the same posture, which will be similar to the seated position they will have been in most of their day at school. Introducing stretches after play can help. There are choices for everyone from Going for a run, a bike ride or another sporting activity such as trampolining or kicking a ball around with friends outside, or something which can be done indoors such as yoga, dancing, or circuit training, there are choices available for everyone.

For more ideas look at [Secondary – activities – outside activities – healthy alternatives](#)

Getting outside – In addition to exercise it is important they also go outside for some sunlight. This is much easier in the summer months than the winter months, but it is essential they get some fresh air and vitamin D.

For activities outside see [Secondary – activities – Outside activities](#)

Sleep and diet – It is important for their mental health as much as their physical health they get the right nutrients and amount of sleep so they can focus on their school work. It is easy, when hungry to grab some convenience snacks so they can get back to gaming as quickly as possible, but this can be harmful to their long-term health, especially if they are not getting any exercise. Encourage healthy snacks and eating proper meals.



Consequences

To ensure these boundaries are adhered to, what are the consequences if your child disobeys what you have agreed on?

- **Do they lose time off the next days play?**
- **Do they have a day of no play?**
- **Are there extra chores they need to do instead?**

Just as you have agreed set boundaries it is important to agree on what the consequences are if your child over steps the boundaries. Start by asking them what they feel the consequences should be for their actions and again, ensure everyone is in agreement. It is really important that these consequences are followed through. Your child may be growing up and seeking independence but it is good practice for them to realise there are always consequences for making bad choices, no matter what age in life.