

Where should we draw tech boundaries in lockdown?

Since the UK was placed under lockdown, our lives have been turned upside down and our routines disrupted left, right and centre.

Fortunately, technology allows us to carry on with some day-to-day tasks in one form or another. Children can continue their education at home, parents and carers can sometimes work from home and we're able to stay in touch with our loved ones in other households thanks to video and text-chatting.

But for all that technology has stepped in to bridge the gap, this increasing reliance on it has probably called into question some of the tech rules your family had before the lockdown started.

So which boundaries should we continue to enforce, and which should we relax? Here's some advice on setting sensible tech limits for families in lockdown.

Rethink your approach to screen time

It can be a tremendous challenge for young people to be stuck inside with their parents and cut off from the rest of the world. Not being able to physically meet their friends and do after-school sports or other social activities can be very stressful, so don't be surprised if they try to fill the vacuum by spending more time online.

It's a fairly common myth that excessive screen time can have a negative effect on young people's wellbeing – but fortunately that's all it is: a myth.

[Research](#) from the Oxford Internet Institute found not only that there was no evidence of screen time negatively impacting young people, but rather that moderate use could be good for their health.

Although you potentially had more defined rules about how much time your child should be spending online before the lockdown, you might find that you have to relax those rules now that the situation has changed so drastically.

Rather than limiting the time they can spend on their devices, encourage them instead to break up their online sessions by, for example, doing some exercise or a chore around the house.

In the hour before bed, however, it's a good idea for them to unwind with something that doesn't involve a screen – for instance reading a book or playing a board game – as it could disrupt their sleep pattern.

Hang on to (some) routines

Routines can be a great way to give children and young people a sense of stability in these unusual times, so while you might allow them a few more hours on their tablets or games consoles each day, you should still try to retain some of the daily patterns they're used to.

Being home from school may feel like a holiday for your child, but even this change of pace can get mind-numbingly boring after a while. Involving your child in some day-to-day tasks – such as planning what to have for dinner, organising a chat with grandparents or deciding which movie to watch in the evening – can help give some structure and a sense of purpose to their day.

... But don't over-monitor

Now that you and your family are spending more time together in such close quarters, it's also important to respect each other's right to privacy. Granted, it might be difficult to get some alone time when the whole family is under the same roof, but be aware that your child needs their personal space – both physically and online.

Don't feel like you have to micromanage what your child spends time on. Parent Zone's [own research](#) in cooperation with the Oxford Internet Institute found that looking over your child's shoulder might not have the desired effect.

Take an interest in what they're doing

Has your child found their new favourite game? Are they engrossed in a new TV show? Although some of their hobbies might feel out of your remit, try to show your child that you take an interest in them. For example, ask them questions about why they enjoy certain games – or better yet, jump in and join them for a round! You might be surprised by how willing they are to share their stuff.

It's a great way to get an insight into their world, as well as getting familiar with the kind of content they're exposed to. Besides, if your child feels like you understand the challenges they're faced with in the online world, they might be more likely to come to you if they need help or have a bad experience.

Be aware of parental controls

If you have younger or more vulnerable children, it could be a good idea to look into what parental controls are available on the platforms and services they enjoy using. Most online services, games consoles and social media platforms offer ways for parents to tailor their child's user experience according to their needs.

These include, for example:

- Disabling or limiting spending in online games
- Preventing children from viewing inappropriate content
- Preventing children from contacting/being contacted by strangers

- Adjust who can see the content they post on social media

But children are resourceful and often find ways to bypass parental controls so it's important to remember that although parental controls can help reduce risks, they do not eliminate them!

Help them build digital resilience

The current climate is throwing new challenges at all of us, but it's important to not lose sight of the fact that the risks for children online are still there – though they might have changed.

Our advice to parents remains the same – **building your child's digital resilience is the most effective way to help them make the most of their online experiences and minimise the risk of them experiencing harm.**

Digital resilience is developed by **understanding** when you might be at risk; **knowing** how to respond to risks and seek help; **learning** from your experiences; and **recovering** when things go wrong.

Have an open conversation with your child where you talk through the challenges they could encounter while playing games, video chatting with friends or doing other activities they enjoy.

Make sure they know that if they come up against problems online, or they end up involved in something they regret, they won't be blamed. We're all learning – especially in this new situation – and learning inevitably means getting some things wrong. The trick is to recognise when it happens and work out how to put things right.

Reassure them that if they have any concerns or stumble across something upsetting, they can come to you for help. It's important to show them that you're prepared and able to help in the right kind of way – ranging from having a sympathetic talk about something they experienced while gaming to reporting something inappropriate on social media.

It's also important to reassure them that experience equips us to deal with the next thing – that in future we will be more rounded, a bit wiser, and a little more confident.