

# Family Values and Digital Choices

## Raising Montessori Children in a Screen-Saturated World

Practical guidance for home: healthy tech habits, family culture, and an actionable plan

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# Goals

- Support children growing up with ubiquitous technology.
- Align tech use with your family culture and Montessori values.
- Leave with a concrete, flexible family media plan.

# Montessori Classrooms and Screen-Based Technology

- Support concentration, independence, and real-world exploration.
- Introduce attention-grabbing screens at the right time to reduce alienation and promote social development instead.
- Contextualize their usage; prioritize hands-on, purposeful activity over passive consumption.
- Model mindful tech use: adults set the tone.
- Use technology as a tool for creation and research, not default entertainment.

**WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS**

# Medical Insights

- For older children in particular, quality & context matter more than raw minutes (AAP)
- For younger children, daily maximum should be 1 hour (AAP)
- Screen time can displace sleep, reading, and physical activity (WHO, ABCD)
- Associations with mood, attention, and mental health vary by type of use (ABCD/JAMA)
- Use for soothing limits development of emotional self-regulation (AAP)

# Developmental Insights

- Co-viewing and guided use mitigate risks.
- Protect sleep: avoid screens 2 hours before bed; devices out of bedrooms.
- Prioritize activity and engagement over passive scrolling.
- Watch for signs of struggle: sleep, academic development, mood, friendships.
- Iterate as kids grow; adjust guardrails together.

# From *Common Sense Media*: Current Trends

- Digital use begins early; tablets/phones common in early childhood.
- Reading for pleasure has declined among 5–8 year-olds.
- AI and gaming use are rising; content quality varies dramatically.
- Families feel tension between tech's benefits and preserving childhood.

# Guidance from *Center for Humane Technology*:

- Create tech-free spaces and times (mornings, meals, bedrooms).
- Turn off non-essential notifications; remove addictive software (apps, games).
- Make high-friction paths to problematic apps (no saved passwords\*).
- Schedule regular digital “detox” days as a family.

\*Teachable moment! A lesson on how to create and protect good passwords.

# **BEST PRACTICES AT HOME**

# Limit Screen Time for Pleasure

- Set daily/weekly caps by age and season; flex for projects & travel.
- Prefer long-form, high-quality content over endless short clips.
- Use timers and shared expectations rather than constant negotiation.
- Balance day: sleep, chores, reading, play. Include both indoor and outdoor activity.

# Be Deliberate About Content

- Pre-select shows, games, and creators that align with your values.
- Leverage ratings/reviews (*Common Sense Media*) before saying “yes.”
- Co-view with younger children; discuss ads, algorithms, and persuasion.
- As children get older, 9-12, favor creation tools (coding, filmmaking, music) over passive feeds.

# Place Devices in Public Spaces

- Computers, televisions, and game consoles live in shared areas, not bedrooms.
- Use screens facing common spaces; avoid closed-door use.
- Charge all devices overnight in a central location.
- Develop and write out family agreement about technology usage, make visible near devices as point of reference.

# Age-Appropriate Conversations

- Early years: feelings, bodies, privacy, asking for help
- Lower Elementary: kindness online, ads, scams, basic search savvy, an introduction to AI as a hazard
- Upper Elementary: social media norms, group chats, digital footprints, motives for misinformation and manipulation
- Emergent adolescence: The misconception of “stranger danger,” practice scripts such as 'Pause, Breathe, Block, Tell an Adult,' narrative of self

# Family Culture & Values

- Name what your family stands for (kindness, curiosity, effort)
- Define ways in which tech as a tool can serve those values
- Create rituals that compete with screens: game nights, hikes, cooking
- Model boredom tolerance, leave space for self-directed play

# Family Culture & Values

- Shared agreements, established ahead of time, limit perception of surprise punishments.
- Repair, not shame, after mistakes online (though a fear-based response is normal).
- Empathy first: 'What goal were you trying to address with the screen?'
- Celebrate purposeful tech projects together.

# **YOUR ACTIONABLE PLAN**

# Build Your Family Media Plan (AAP)

- Agree on daily routines: sleep, homework, outdoor time, chores.
- List tech-free zones/times (meals, bedrooms, car rides, days of the week/ times of day).
- Set age-appropriate time windows and content tiers\*.
- Decide on consequences and repair steps together.

# Build Your Family Media Plan (AAP)

- Create a 'green-light' media list and a 'creation menu'.
- Turn off non-essential notifications; remove autoplay where possible.
- Install parental controls as coaching tools, not secret surveillance.
- Review the plan every 3 months and after big life changes.

# Conversation Prompts

- What did you think about what you watched/played today?
  - What was your favorite thing about it?
  - Would you recommend it to someone?
    - » What is it about it that you think they will particularly like?
  - Did it remind you of something else?
    - » What was it about them that you found similar?
    - » Which one did you prefer?
      - Why?
- What's one ad or recommendation you noticed? What stood out about it to you?
- Did this piece of media help you create, understand something better, or connect today?
- What's one small change we could try this week to our family's mixture of time on/off screens?

The key is conscious usage as opposed to passive consumption.

# Red Flags & When to Get Help

- Persistent sleep problems, declining academic performance, isolation, mood changes.
- Secret accounts, sudden account/ history deletions, online harassment.
- Compulsive use despite harm; loss of interest in offline activities.
- Talk to your pediatrician, school administrator, or a licensed therapist.

# Starter kit: One-Week Experiment

- Add: tech-free mornings + 2 family dinners + 1 outdoor block
- Subtract: notifications on 3 apps; remove 1 autoplay feed\*
- Swap: 30 minutes of scrolling in isolation → making with a screen based device together (draw, code, record)
- Reflect: Next Friday check-in, what felt better? What was hard?

\*More great teachable moments- how do you do this?

# Family Tech Meeting

Co-creating screen guidelines  
aligned with our family culture  
and values

# Expectations/ Norms and Agenda

- This is an investment in your family, early establishment pays later dividends
- Norms: assume good intent, everyone needs to talk (both children and adults), one voice at a time, any decision made now can be revisited later.
- 1) What matters to us? (10 min)
- 2) Map our devices & habits (5 min)
- 3) Observations of pain points (5 min)
- 4) Draft shared agreements (10–15 min)
- 5) Evaluate plan & progress monitoring (5–8 min)

# Warm-Up: Our Family Culture

- What do we, the adults in this family, believe in?
  - How did we come to believe in these things?
  - Why do we hope to teach you their value?
  - Which of these values can be served through the use of technology? □ kindness □ curiosity □ effort □ creativity □ health □ other:
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- What we hope screens help us do: □ learn □ create □ connect □ relax

# Goal Setting

- What we most want to protect:  sleep  reading  
 outdoor play  chores  family time
- Top 3 screen free traditions to strengthen:
- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

# Map Our Devices & Habits

- Devices: phones, tablets, computers, TVs, consoles, watches
- Who uses what, where, when? (make a quick list)

Document, document, document!

# Sharing Observations

- Pain points: mornings? transitions? YouTube rabbit holes? scrolling? separating from an in-use device?
- What already works well that we'll keep?

# Tech Roles: A Balanced Diet

- Create: coding, writing, music, filming, design
- Learn: research, documentaries, courses
- Connect: messages with known friends/family
- Relax: shows/games, a working list of agreed on titles, limit autoplay

Discussion: Does all screen time come from the same bucket?

# Shared Agreements — Spaces

- Tech-free zones:  bedrooms  bathrooms  car/commute  table/meals  other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Charging station: location \_\_\_\_\_ ;  
all children's devices dock by \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_
- Public spaces only for computers/consoles;  
screens face common areas

# Shared Agreements — Times

- Tech-free times: weekend mornings until \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ ; during homework; 2 hrs before bed at \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_

Important point: “Equal” is not the same as “fair,” not everyone in the house has the same roles, needs, freedoms and responsibilities.

# Shared Agreements on Time Windows

- Weekdays: Create/Learn (\_\_\_\_–\_\_\_\_), Relax (\_\_\_\_–\_\_\_\_)?
- Weekends/holidays: larger but bounded windows; Create/Learn (\_\_\_\_–\_\_\_\_), Relax (\_\_\_\_–\_\_\_\_)
- Sleep: screens off  $\geq 2$  hrs before bed; devices out of bedrooms
- Use timers and end-of-session rituals to ease transitions

Write out a family use agreement ! This is a part of the annual cycle in the 9-12 environment.

# Age Distinctions

- Ages 6–9: shorter, scheduled sessions; more co-viewing
- Ages 9–12: more autonomy with check-ins; daily cap agreement, specific uses on specific days.

# Shared Agreement Content Tiers

Content Tier	Examples	Family Rules
GREEN (always okay)	How-to videos, documentaries, maker apps, coding, family movies, messages with known friends/family	Okay within windows; extend for projects
YELLOW (ask first)	New creators/games, group chats, competitive games, AI for homework brainstorming	Adult preview/first-use; time-limited; co-view/discuss
RED (not for now)	Age-restricted apps, violent/sexualized content, anonymous chat, unlimited autoplay/reels	Blocked/removed; revisit at quarterly review

Customize with titles/creators your family knows.

# Shared Agreements; Safety & Settings

- Notifications: off except family & essential apps.
- Autoplay & infinite scroll: off where possible.
- Purchases & passwords: parent approval; no saved cards [create hardcopy storage].
- Privacy: only known contacts; no personal info without asking.
- Kindness: grace & courtesy online = in person.

# Repair Plan (Learning, Not Shame)

- Pause → Breathe → Tell a trusted adult
- Repair: apology, undo/replace, quick safety lesson (Hands on! Modeling and verbalization is critical)
- Temporary, tailored limits; restore with a plan
- We focus on learning & rebuilding trust

# Scripts You Can Use

- Child: “Can I watch/play \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_ min? If yes, I’ll do \_\_\_\_\_ after.”
- Parent: “What need are you meeting: create, learn, connect, or relax?”

# Scripts You Can Use

- Group chat drama: “Screenshot, block, tell an adult. Let’s roleplay replies.”
- Weird link/content: “Thanks for telling me, let’s report/block together.”

# Managing Misinformation

**L**earn about the author

**I**nvestigate

**F**ind other coverage

**T**rack claims

**S**top before sharing

- Read “around” the page, not merely “down” the page.
- Play “Fact or Opinion”
- **Model effective queries**

- Bookmark a trusted fact checker:

- [FactCheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org)

- Politifact

- Snopes

# Commit & Review

- Next check-in: every \_\_\_\_\_ (weekly/ monthly in brief?) + quarterly review on \_\_\_\_\_
- Track: sleep, mood, schoolwork, friendships, creativity
- Celebrate wins; adjust what isn't working
- Remember, create and sign a document you can refer back to! Post visibly!

# **SOURCES & FURTHER READING**

# Key References and Resources

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- Common Sense Media
- Center for Humane Technology
- ABCD Study / JAMA Public Health analyses on screen time associations
- WHO: Sedentary behaviour & physical activity guidance