

THE
WILLOW
SCHOOL



THE SCREEN DETOX



Cell phones
Game consoles
YouTube
Tablets
SnapChat
Instagram
TV
TikTok
Facebook
and the list goes on...

Why a Screen Detox?

We're almost certain that arguing about devices is a regular thing in your household. According to the author of *Glow Kids*, Dr. Nicholas Kardaras, the average teenager now spends eleven hours per day in front of a screen. This is cause for great concern, as research has connected screen time to ADHD, anxiety, depression, and increased aggression.



8 signs your pre-teen (and you) may need a digital detox

1. Won't leave the house without phone/iPad
2. Feel the need to check device for no reason
3. Dependent on digital device for entertainment
4. Prefer to be on digital device(s) or watch TV while together as a family
5. Obsess over social media (likes, comments, posts)
6. Afraid of not being "online" enough and missing what friends are posting (commonly known as FOMO: Fear of Missing Out)
7. Prefer to scroll through phone during any free moment (i.e. while standing on line at checkout)
8. Check phone last thing before going to bed and first thing upon waking up



Dangers from too much screen time include:

- Disrupted sleep
- Obesity
- Neck and back pain
- Headaches
- Reduced attention span
- Violence or increased aggression
- Dry Eye Syndrome and CVS (Computer Vision Syndrome a.k.a. Digital Eye Strain)
- Behavior and educational problems, including heightened stress levels and impaired cognitive function

What can you do about it?



1st

Get a Handle on It

Your middle schooler is a digital native. He hasn't lived in a time without the internet or social media. Do you know how much time he is actually spending on his device? Free apps like *Moment* can help you track your adolescent's screen use so you can better understand what you're managing.



2nd

Use the four tips below along with our seven-day detox challenge

Tip I: Start slow.

If your child is already accustomed to unlimited screen time, changing this pattern cold-turkey may only lead to resentment, anxiety, and confusion. Instead, begin by designating screen-free windows of time during the day, for example, while eating, or in areas where your family spends time together, like during car rides.

If this implementation is new to your family, it's likely that you'll receive some push-back – but stick with it. As screen-free time becomes routine in your family, it will get easier for everyone.





Tip 2: Play games together.

Before the screen-free idea becomes routine, your child will probably be counting down the minutes before getting back online. Use screen-free time to really connect with your family and make it fun! This will teach your child that being off their screens isn't a punishment, and (even if they won't admit it) they'll enjoy having this time to be creative and express themselves.

Try these activities:

The Peak and the Pit: During your next meal together, go around the table and have your family members share the "peak" of their day (the best part of their day) and the "pit" of their day (the worst part of their day). This is an entertaining way to get your child to open up and can lead to deeper conversations. Turning discussions into games with clear direction is more likely to engage your child than the usual, open-ended "how was your day?" (to which he'd likely respond "fine" and quickly end the probing). Don't be afraid to share your peak and pit as well. Even if you don't get into specifics, your child will appreciate that you're sharing and is likely to ask you some questions too!

20 Questions: A classic car-ride game. Players pick well known figures or celebrities, and their fellow passengers have to guess who it is using only 20 yes or no questions. Formulating yes or no questions will spark your child's creativity. Rewards for the winner never hurt!



Tip 3: Set limits.

If you're not able to implement the screen-free concept in your family, then set healthy limits. Having a schedule is a great way to teach your child balance. Because kids benefit from routine, dedicated screen time is likely to resonate with them as normal, as opposed to punishment. Be prepared to negotiate the screen time schedule as your child gets older, however remain consistent in setting parameters.

Consider a day of the week (perhaps Saturday or Sunday mornings) when your child can binge their favorite shows or games for longer than they're normally allowed. Giving your child this time will make screen-free seem less like a punishment, and it will give her a chance to self-regulate, too.



Tip 4: Talk to your middle schooler about why you're limiting screen time.

This age group is intelligent and can be very receptive to direct, adult conversation. Make it a family discussion, not a mandated order. Take the time to learn why he feels that screens are a must-have in his life and be transparent about the dangers of being on a screen for too long.

THE SEVEN-DAY SMARTPHONE DETOX CHALLENGE

MON

Delete all the apps and social media accounts that you don't use.

TUES

Buy an alarm clock. Tonight, resist the urge to sleep with your phone at arm's distance or look at it first thing when you wake up.

WED

No phones (that includes the quick casual scroll) during meals. If possible, go for a family walk or bike ride after dinner.

THUR

Turn off screens at least one hour before bed.

FRI

Don't use your phone while you're alone today. Remember, it's ok to be bored.

SAT

Social media free day.

SUN

Turn off your phone for the whole day.



3rd

**Remember
that it's OK
to be bored.**

Don't fear free time. It's ok if your child is not mentally stimulated at all times. Free time (not to watch movies or play video games) is crucial in helping kids develop their creativity and learn to entertain themselves with a hobby, a book, or other creative endeavor. Relying on digital devices as entertainment for every waking moment takes away your child's opportunities for exploration and play.

Social Media, Gaming and Dopamine

Dopamine provides the drive and motivation needed to be productive. It is known as the feel-good hormone.

Because middle schoolers are hyper conscious of their relationships and what their peers think of them, successful social interactions (including digital ones through social media) release dopamine, giving them a sudden jolt of gratification. Therefore, like other addictive substances, social media followers or posts receiving likes and comments release a substantial amount of dopamine – that can very well impact a pre-teen's mood and sense of self-worth.

According to Psychology Today, gaming also releases a lot of the feel-good chemical – so much so that on a brain scan it looks the same as cocaine use.

Healthy Ways to Increase Dopamine in Your Middle Schooler Include:

- Eliminating artificial, processed foods as much as possible and replacing with protein, healthy fats, and complex carbs.
- Getting outside and soaking in plenty of natural sunshine.
- Daily exercise and/or frequent movement breaks while doing homework or other focused activities.
- Making sleep a priority. According to the National Sleep Foundation, school-aged children (6-13 years) should get 9-11 hours of sleep a night.



You Set the Tone

Remember that “screen free” applies to you too! Children are very impressionable and tend to imitate what they see. Having the TV on for background noise all the time or scrolling through your phone during any spare minute is inadvertently teaching your child bad habits.

There is also a condition that tech experts call *Continuous Partial Attention (CPA)*. This is a condition that affects parents who are seemingly multitasking, but in reality, are actually distracted by their phones. You may be paying attention to your child, but only partially. This type of half-focus interaction with both your child and your screen can lead you to miss or misread emotional cues or be quickly angered when either your child or your phone interrupt one another.

If being on your phone is a must for you, then take mindful steps to be conscious of your screen use. Make efforts to limit it as much as possible when engaging with your child.

THE WILLOW SCHOOL

At Willow, we encourage students to be present and help them develop the skills to tackle real world problems within their community.

Is Willow a good fit for your child?

A visit to Willow will open your eyes to everything education can and should be. Contact us to schedule a tour!

(908) 470-9500 • info@willowschool.org