

Dr Kristy
GOODWIN

Digital Wellbeing Checklist

*realistic, research-based solutions to help kids,
teens and adults develop healthy digital habits.*



Whether you love technology or loathe digital devices, your kids and teens will inherit a digital future. So 'digital amputation' isn't a solution. Your child or teen needs to develop healthy and helpful digital habits so that they're not a slave to the screen. As modern parents we need to help foster our kids' digital wellbeing and that's exactly what this Digital Wellbeing Checklist will do.

Below you'll find 20 research-based and realistic strategies to ensure that your child's or teen's digital habits are healthy and not harmful... so you can finally ditch your guilt, grief and guesswork as you raise a 'screenager'. (Nudge, nudge. Many of these tips also work for adults too.)

BE THE PILOT OF THE DIGITAL PLANE (NOT THE PASSENGER)- Our kids and teens need guidance about how to safely navigate the digital world. Why? Their developing brains mean that young children and teens are vulnerable to many of the online risks and the 'addictive' potential technology poses (the part of their brain that helps with impulse control and working memory, called their 'frontal lobe', is still developing and isn't fully developed until they're in their mid-20s). If parents are in the pilot's seat you can help them to course-correct so when/if they hit digital turbulence (exposure to pornography, cyber-bullying, online predators, digital dependence) they won't crash the plane.

BE A GOOD DIGITAL ROLE MODEL- Be mindful of your own digital habits as our kids and teens imitate our behaviour (they have mirror neurons in their brain so they are hard-wired to copy). Can you carve out tech-free time and zones in your house? Having screen-free meals is great for not only connection with your child/teen, but also to promote mindful eating habits.

ESTABLISH BOUNDARIES AROUND YOUR CHILD/TEEN'S TECH HABITS- And not just how much time they spend plugged in, but also what content they can consume (what is age-appropriate? Safe? Educational?), where (what places in your home are no-go tech zones?), when (what times of the day do you need to limit or avoid tech access?), how they use digital devices (so that their physical health and mental well-being is preserved) and with who they can interact with online (to ensure their cyber-safety). Remember, establishing boundaries requires your child's/teen's involvement so they're more likely to follow the boundaries.





TALK TO YOUR CHILD/TEEN ABOUT THEIR 'DIGITAL DNA'- every single post, comment, photo, video is curating your child's digital footprint. Children and teens don't have fully developed prefrontal cortex's (the part of the brain that manages their impulses) so they are likely to post things that they will later regret. This is why we must encourage them to pause-before-you-post and keep technology in publically-accessible parts of the house (your daughter is unlikely to be sending nudes sitting next to you on the lounge, or at the kitchen bench). Teach kids that the Internet is like Vegas- what you write/share/post online stays online... even if it's been deleted or dragged to the trash.

ESTABLISH A BEDTIME FOR DIGITAL DEVICES. To promote healthy sleep habits your child/teen needs to digitally disconnect at least 60 minutes before they need to fall asleep (to prevent the blue light from their devices sabotaging their sleep).

SPECIFY THE TECH-FREE ZONES IN YOUR HOUSE. Keep bedrooms tech-free zones to ensure that digital devices aren't interfering with your child/teen's sleep cycles. The pings of alerts and notifications results in many kids not getting a sufficient number of completed sleep cycles and this is impacting the quality of their sleep. How? Memory consolidation occurs in the final two stages of sleep and many kids/teens aren't getting to these sleep stages because their devices are interrupting their sleep cycles. Have a designated 'landing zone' where all digital devices are stored each night so you can do a quick tech-headcount before bed. Other suggested tech-free zones include play areas, bathrooms, meal areas and cars (for short trips to school/soccer/dance etc).

USE THE 20-20-20-20 STRATEGY TO PROMOTE HEALTHY DIGITAL EYE HABITS. Every 20 minutes kids use any screen, they need to take a 20 second break, look at something 20 feet away and blink at least 20 times (to help lubricate their eyes).

MAXIMISE THEIR 'GREEN TIME' Children and teens need 15-20 hours in natural sunlight each week. Sunlight helps to regulate their circadian rhythm to help with their sleep and also helps to elongate their myopic nerve to reduce the onset of myopia (near-sightedness).

MINIMISE DIGITAL DEVICE USE AT NIGHT. Not only does screen use impact on sleep quality and quantity (as outlined above), but it's also the time of the day when most cyberbullying occurs. Why? The logical part of the brain (prefrontal cortex) switches off and the emotional brain (the amygdala) switches on, so kids are more likely to send messages/photos/comments they'll later regret. Tell your kids that phones and social media are a bit like footballers at night- nothing good happens after midnight.



ENCOURAGE MONO-TASKING, NOT MULTI-TASKING- despite your teenager's desperate attempts to convince you that they can scroll social media, whilst simultaneously listening to music on their headphones, watching Netflix and completing an online assessment task, their brain (in fact it applies to us as adults) is incapable of processing multiple streams of information. Instead, they're engaging in 'continuous partial attention', or rapid task switching. This has devastating impacts on their learning. When we multitask we burn through glucose (energy supply in the brain), we release cortisol (a stress hormone which inhibits learning) and we send information to the wrong part of the brain (it goes to the striatum and not the hippocampus, which is the memory centre of the brain).

ARM YOUR CHILD/TEEN WITH STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH TECHNO-TANTRUMS- it's important to note that unlike 'regular' tantrums it's still 'normal' for your child/teen to emotionally combust when they digitally disconnect. Why? Technology has an impact on their brain and body. For example, their brains are often flooded with 'dopamine' (a pleasure neurotransmitter) when they're online, so unplugging them from devices is terminating their supply of dopamine (resulting in frustrated, angry and even aggressive behaviour). To prevent the dreaded techno-tantrum, suggest that your child/teen engages in physical activity after their tech time to help their brains produce dopamine (and other positive neurotransmitters and hormones). Time in nature ('green time') can also help their overloaded sensory and nervous systems calm down after gaming or watching fast-paced TV.

GIVE YOUR CHILD QUANTITIES AND HARD END POINTS TO HELP THEM MANAGE THEIR TIME ONLINE- One of the reasons parents encounter their child's/teen's techno-tantrum is because kids enter the 'state of insufficiency' when they're online. They never feel 'done' or complete when they're online (clever and manipulative design techniques such as the auto-play feature on YouTube and Netflix and the ping of alerts and notifications are why kids struggle with this). There's always another YouTube clip that's appealing, or they can update their social media feed. They rarely, if ever, experience feeling 'finished' when they're online. Rather than prescribing an amount of time (which is pointless if kids are aged under 8 years as time is a very abstract concept), give them quantities. For example, "You can have 5 Fortnite battles today." "You can watch three episodes on the YouTube channel."

SET UP PARENTAL CONTROLS AND RESTRICTIONS ON ALL DEVICES AND USE INTERNET-FILTERING TOOLS- I personally use and recommend the [Family Zone](#) as a great Internet-filtering tool. It's important to note that you still need to have ongoing conversations with your child about what to do if they see something inappropriate online.



HAVE ONGOING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY- I know this is confronting to read, but our kids are being exposed to pornography at younger and younger ages and they cannot 'unsee' it. We need to be starting these conversations from around 6-8 years of age. If you want to know how to tackle these tricky conversations in age-appropriate ways and with some suggested scripts, download my PDF Summary Sheet and watch my "The Pornography Problem Plaguing Parents" webinar (it's completely free).

HAVE OPEN AND ONGOING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT TECHNOLOGY WITH YOUR CHILD/TEEN (FROM THE MOMENT YOU HAND OVER AN IPHONE)- this powerfully communicates to your child that you value what they do on digital devices (stopping them from thinking that technology is taboo) and allows you to talk to them about what they're doing online. Talk to them about what they post on social media, or online and help them to critically evaluate what their peers and other people are sharing online.

KEEP YOUR BOUNDARIES SIMPLE (your child/teen doesn't have a fully developed working memory yet). So when it comes to social media the simple rules are: keep it clean and clothed. When it's time to post anything online, encourage your children to pause before they post and ask themselves, "What would Grandma/school principal say if they saw what I was about to post?"

AVOID USING TECHNOLOGY AS A REWARD- kids and teens ordinarily love technology so we don't need to entice good behaviour with more tech time. It will elevate the status of technology even more (and they already love their tech) and it will also develop a transactional relationship with you. Kids will start saying, "I'll unpack the dishwasher if I can use the iPad."

AVOID USING DIGITAL DEVICES AS A PUNISHMENT TOOL- seems counterintuitive I know, but if there's a perceived threat that we'll digitally amputate our kids, they won't come to us when they're facing a digital dilemma. This is particularly the case with cyber-bullying and online predators. Our kids/teens need to feel assured that they can come to us with any online issue.

PLAN, DON'T BAN DEVICES. If you ban screens, you often drive behaviour underground. As the pilot of the digital plane, establish firm rules about when, where, how and the length of time technology can be used.

PRESERVE AND PROMOTE BOREDOM. Boredom is good for our kids (and us, too!). Human brains weren't designed to be switched on and constantly processing information 24/7. Our brains need opportunities for plenty of whitespace and daydreaming. When we allow ourselves enough time to daydream or mind-wander, we create space to come up with creative ideas and solutions to problems. It's also when our kids can start to form an understanding of who they are.

So there you have a simple checklist to ensure that your child or teen is using technology in healthy and helpful ways. I deliver talks to students, parents, educators and health professionals throughout Australia and Asia. To find out more, or to enquire about me speaking at your school or event click [here](#).



Get Social with Dr Kristy



 FACEBOOK

 INSTAGRAM

 LINKED IN

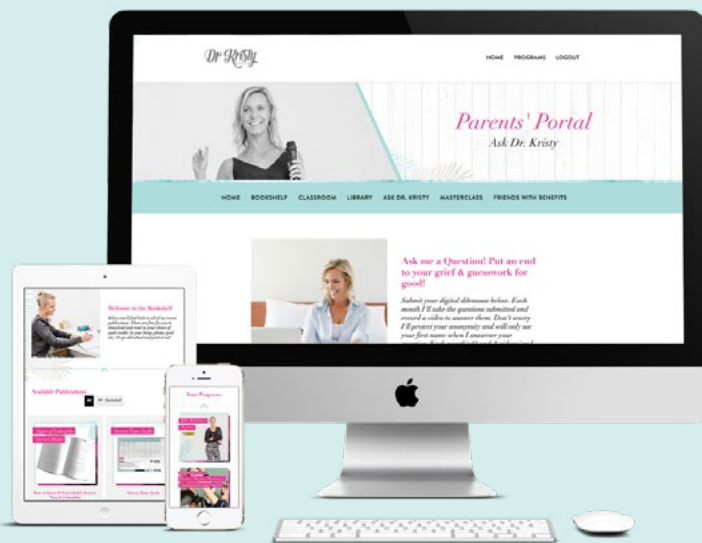
 WEBSITE

Dr Kristy Goodwin is a digital wellbeing and performance speaker, researcher, author and media commentator (and mum, who regularly deals with her own kids' techno-tantrums). Kristy translates the science and research about how technology is impacting children, teens' and adults' health, wellbeing and performance into practical advice and realistic tips. Kristy's on a mission to help us tame our tech habits, without suggesting we abstain from using technology. You can find out more about how she helps parents navigate the digital world without the grief, guilt and guesswork at www.drkristygoodwin.com, or you can find answers to your digital dilemmas at <https://drkristygoodwin.com/switched-on-parents-portal/>.





Tired of spending hours on Google trawling for answers to your most troubling tech questions? Do you want to put an end to the guilt, grief and guesswork when it comes to your child or teen's screen time? Are you looking for realistic solutions to your child's or teen's digital dilemmas? Want reliable answers to your digital dilemmas?



Let me help you find peace of mind in the digital age (without suggesting that you ban the phone, or hide their gaming console).

SWITCHED ON, *Parents'* PORTAL

FIND OUT MORE

Access video recordings of my most popular parent seminars, view mini-masterclasses on current issues facing parents of 4-16 year olds, access a library of videos on specific 'digital dilemmas', download PDF tip sheets and eBooks. You'll have a library of (ironically) online resources (at the click of a button) that can help you navigate your kids' digital world. A one-off fee provides lifetime access to the library so you'll be able to access new content when it's added. Ditch your guilt & guesswork for good.



WWW.DRKISTRYGOODWIN.COM