



Screen Guides

We all know smartphones are incredible pieces of technology. Especially here in Taos, we use them to stay connected, understand street addresses and in-coming weather, take thousands of photos – and even to keep tabs on our kids.

HOWEVER! All the ways phones help us navigate and connect can be overshadowed by the amount of time we spend entertaining ourselves with them. Video games, social-media scrolls, streaming content... phones can overwhelm us with too much information of too little value.

The Goal Is Balance

It's all about balance. Phones are here to stay – for us and for our kids – but what we really need now is balance. And for our kids, this balancing act is even more important.

Why? Since the iPhone's invention in 2007, there has been a sharp and connected rise in youth depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, even suicide. We have to help them navigate this digital world. Just like we teach them to speak, learn, and engage with the wider world, so too we must help them better balance screens in their lives. It has become a core parenting task.

When you really think about it, our kids “rent” phones from us, their parents. They “pay” for them with good behavior. So let's talk about what “good behavior” means!

We've been teaching kids for a few years now on screen balance at schools all around Taos County. Here's what we've learned.

1. Every family should consider creating a **Screen Guide**. This can spell out important details on how screens – especially phones – are used in your child's life. For example:
 - a. **Mornings:** are screens allowed before school? *Teachers across Taos all talk about the hugely detrimental effect of this, with children often wanting to “swipe” a teacher for being boring...*
 - b. **Meals:** are devices allowed at the family table?
 - c. **Night-time:** are devices allowed in your child's room overnight? *Findings from across the country show how this can directly lead to loneliness, sleeplessness and anxiety...*
 - d. **The Car:** are screens allowed when driving to/from school or doing errands?
2. **Incentives work.** Nobody wants to turn in their phone. So reward good behavior. If they turn in their phone by 8pm without being asked? Friday night becomes a Dessert Night!
3. **Be Flexible.** No rule around screens is 100% correct 100% of the time. Roll with it!

4. There are many things a child can do on their phone. Talk about the differences between **entertainment** (video games, movies, social media), **productivity** (doing homework, learning recipes) and **personal connection** (talking to friends/family, sharing photos).
5. **Earn your Turns!** Before any phone time... is the dog walked? The dishes done? Homework finished?

Screen Guides: Ideas

We recommend keeping any **Screen Guide** super simple. Here are key things to think about as you and your child/children create one for your family. And we do recommend writing one together!

1. **Schedule.** Specify here exactly:
 - a. when your child can use their phone during an average week. A lot of Taos families set time limits (e.g. 2 hours of screen time after dinner) and then use the Screen Time settings on their child's phones to enforce it.
 - b. where your child leaves his/her phone at night. We HIGHLY recommend turning in phones to the parent's bedroom.
 - c. what type of things your child may do when online.
 - d. what use is allowed in the mornings, after-school, in the car...
2. **Responsibility.** Your child will:
 - a. respect time and content limits set by parents
 - b. only use devices in common areas
 - c. check the phone in at night!
3. **Safety.** Specify that your child will
 - a. NOT post any content to social media without your permission
 - b. NOT accept friend requests, message, or play games with strangers
 - c. NOT share name or location or any other identifying detail with strangers
 - d. TELL you about anything uncomfortable that has happened online.
4. **Honesty.** Encourage or require your child to:
 - a. Always share usernames and passwords with you
 - b. Allow you to set privacy settings without complaint!
 - c. Never create any accounts (e.g. finstagram) without parents' permission.
5. **Balance and Creativity**
 - a. What activities (sports, going outside, trampoline, drawing etc.) will offset screentime?
 - b. Mindfulness practices (example): **20-20-20** – Set a timer. **After 20 minutes** of screen time, put the phone down or pause the game. Look into the distance a minimum of **20 feet** for a minimum of **20 seconds**. This resets your brain and helps your eyes.
6. **Consequences.** Set some realistic consequences for when these rules are broken. How long does the phone disappear for on a first offense? A second? When these are known up front, they can be much more easily tolerated.

Questions? Call or text us at 575-425-0222. Email Kiki at kiki@truekids1.org.

PARKING LOT

→ I don't think this table goes in this doc, but you may want it.

Entertainment	Productivity	Connection
playing video games	doing homework or research for school	texting friends and family
social media	writing essays or working on creative projects (like art or music)	talking on the phone
watching movies or TV shows	learning new skills (like coding or photography)	video chatting (FaceTime, Zoom, Google Meet)
scrolling through social media (Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat)	using apps for organization, like calendars or to-do lists	sending voice messages
browsing memes or funny videos	reading articles or eBooks for learning	collaborating with friends or classmates on a project via Google Docs or other app
using filters on apps like Snapchat for fun	attending virtual school or tutoring sessions	sharing photos or updates with family in a group chat
listening to music or podcasts just for fun.	following tutorials for cooking, DIY projects/crafts, or learning a new language	