Supporting Families with Digital Media Use

A Relational Approach

1. Recognize what families already do well

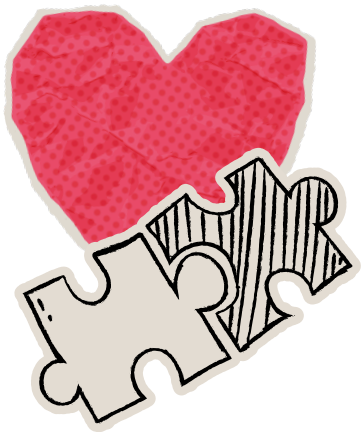
- Simply recommending digital media isn't enough to create lasting change.
- Start by recognizing what families already do well—talking, playing, reading, and connecting.
- Frame digital media as **one part** of a child's day, alongside sleep, movement, play, and connection. Encourage caregivers to model healthy habits, such as putting phones away during family time.

2. Use open-ended questions to spark reflection

- What does your child's evening routine usually look like?
- What does your child enjoy watching or doing on screens?
- When do screens tend to be most helpful—or most disruptive?

3. Explore barriers with curiosity

- What gets in the way of doing more of the things you value?
- Work together to identify small, realistic changes that fit the family's routines and priorities.

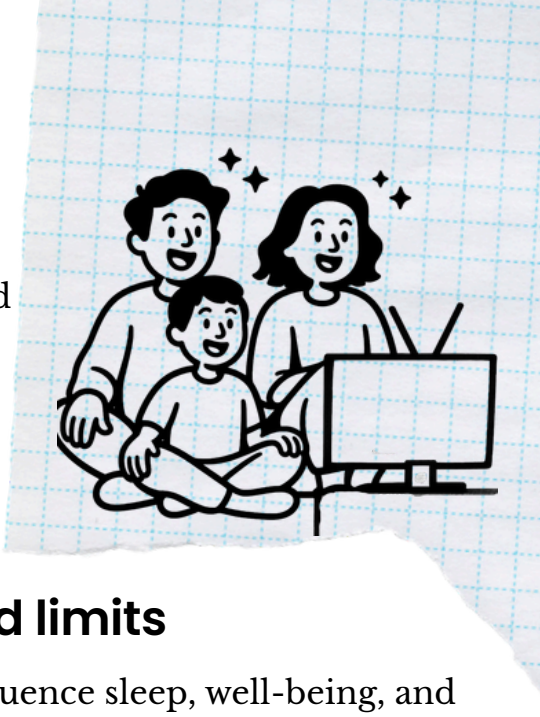


4. Acknowledge realities & avoid shame

- Families often rely on screens for practical reasons, such as managing competing responsibilities.
- Acknowledge these realities without judgment and help families identify strategies that work for them.

5. Promote co-viewing & engagement

- Encourage caregivers to watch or play with their child and ask questions about what they're seeing or doing.
- Shared digital experiences can create opportunities for conversation, learning, and connection.



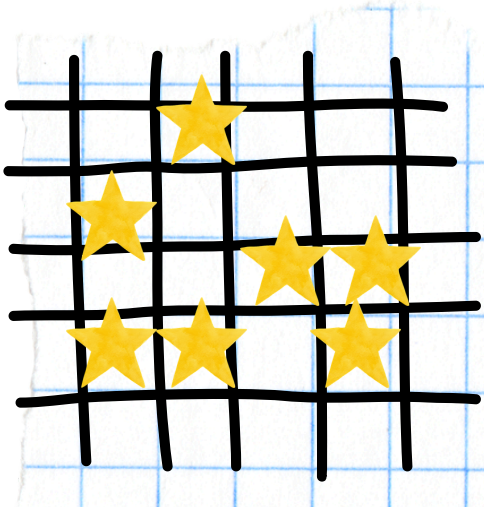
Child
Content
Calm
Communication
Crowding Out

6. Explain the "why" behind limits

- Explain how digital media may influence sleep, well-being, and opportunities for play and connection.
- Introduce the **5 Cs of Digital Media Use** to help families consider what children watch, how they use screens, and what screen time replaces - not just the number of minutes.

7. Focus on progress, not perfection

- Work with families to identify one small, achievable change, such as screen-free meals or devices out of the bedroom.
- Check in about what's working and adjust strategies as children's needs and family routines change.
- Celebrate progress and remind caregivers that balance doesn't have to look the same every day.



This guide was informed by evidence from the American Academy of Pediatrics' Digital Ecosystem, Children, and Adolescents: Policy Statement (2026)

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More digital media guidance