

A Parent's Guide

to digital wellbeing in India



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FROM
THE

EXPERTS

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Children need to understand the 'why' behind your rules. Why are you restricting social media? Why are there specific screen time hours? **If parents and children can sit down and openly discuss the reasons behind these boundaries, most conflicts can be sorted out.**

Dr K S Meena

Professor and Head, Department of Mental Health Education, NIMHANS

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One thing parenthood has made me far more conscious of is my own relationship with technology. Children notice what we do long before they listen to what we say. They do not distinguish between a work message and an unnecessary scroll. They simply see that a screen has our attention. **That is why, in our home, we have become more intentional about putting our phones away during meals or family time. Those small moments quietly show a child that technology has a place in our lives, but it should not take over them.**

Soha Ali Khan

Actor

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I've realised that being too strict or simply snatching devices away doesn't really teach children how to make good choices. What helps is showing them, from an early age, that technology has its place. **It can help them learn, explore a new hobby or discover something they're curious about, but it should never replace real conversations, family time or the confidence that their worth isn't measured by what happens on a screen.**

Neha Dhupia

Actor

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Digital balance isn't just about cutting hours; **it requires a parallel track where parents help children develop meaningful alternatives to fill that space.** When you take the screen away, what does the kid do? Children who develop other interests find it much easier to unplug.

Dr Samir Parikh

Chairperson, Mental Health Program, Fortis Healthcare and Adayu Mindfulness

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Youngsters think like adults, and we need to treat them that way by giving them priority in these discussions. Work with your child to co-create a schedule; unless they personally commit to the plan, they won't follow it. **Digital boundaries must be built on a mutual accountability contract.**

Vinoth Chandar

Founder and CEO, ChuChu TV Studios

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This handbook should be a great starting point for more meaningful conversations. I particularly love the points on swapping roles and letting the child be the expert (because they often are, when it comes to digital innovation), as well as not framing these as lectures so much as exercises in critical thinking.

Amrita Tripathi

Founder, The Health Collective

DISCLAIMER

The insights shared by our experts are meant to guide and inspire, not dictate. We encourage you to use your best judgment and adapt these ideas in a way that feels right for your family.

THE SUMMER BREAK

is behind us. The new school year is in full-swing and so is the challenge of balancing textbooks with digital screens. This transition is the perfect time to set healthy new habits. The digital wellbeing guide, created in consultation with experts, provides parents with simple, actionable ways to move your family from screen time negotiations to safe, high-quality learning, entertainment and exploration. Together, you can help your tweens and teens use the best of the internet for the school year ahead.



This guide is intended solely for informational and educational purposes. The strategies, frameworks, and actionable tips provided are general suggestions to help support digital wellbeing. Because every household, child, and family dynamic is unique, parents and caregivers should use their own discretion and judgment to adapt these suggestions to their specific circumstances.

This guide does not constitute professional medical, psychological, or developmental advice.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

A FOUNDATIONAL NOTE FOR PARENTS

Successful digital wellbeing begins with simple household habits:

1 Nurture openness early
True digital safety is built on a foundation of judgment-free, open communication. Start cultivating a safe environment for open and honest conversations during early childhood and middle school years, ensuring they feel secure sharing experiences with you as they grow.

2 Be the role model
Children emulate behaviors rather than rules. We cannot effectively ask a tween or teen to put their device away if we are actively scrolling on our own phones at the dining table or during family hours.

3 Introduce 'Energy Capsules'
People generally gravitate toward positive actions rather than restrictions. Instead of just taking screens away, give them something else to do. Redirect your child's physical and creative energy toward alternatives such as active sports, nature, or shared household tasks like baking and setting the table.

"It is about replacing an old habit with a new ritual. You can start small. We started with a 15-minute screen-free car ride to discuss common topics, and let that connection grow naturally."

Vinoth Chandar

Founder and CEO,
ChuChu TV Studios



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Follow the '4 Cs' to build a family plan

Building a successful digital wellbeing plan for your family requires four steps. First, build and maintain **Connection** through quality time with your children. Next, improve **Communication** to bridge the gaps caused by busy schedules. Third, focus on **Conflict Resolution** by managing emotions and avoiding judgmental attitudes when discussing tech. Only after you've built these first three can you successfully reach **Coordination**, the stage where you actually negotiate and co-create a tech schedule and limits together with your tweens and teens.

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'Digital Sunsets' to help regulate sleep

To reduce bedtime screen negotiations and improve sleep, families should adopt a winding-down routine. For instance:

- **5 hours before bed:** Get some physical activity.
- **4 hours before bed:** Cut off caffeine, high-sugar drinks, and chocolate.
- **3 hours before bed:** Spend quality, screen-free family time together.
- **2 hours before bed:** Eat dinner together.
- **1 hour before bed:** Put all screens away to let the brain wind down.

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Create 'Digital Islands'

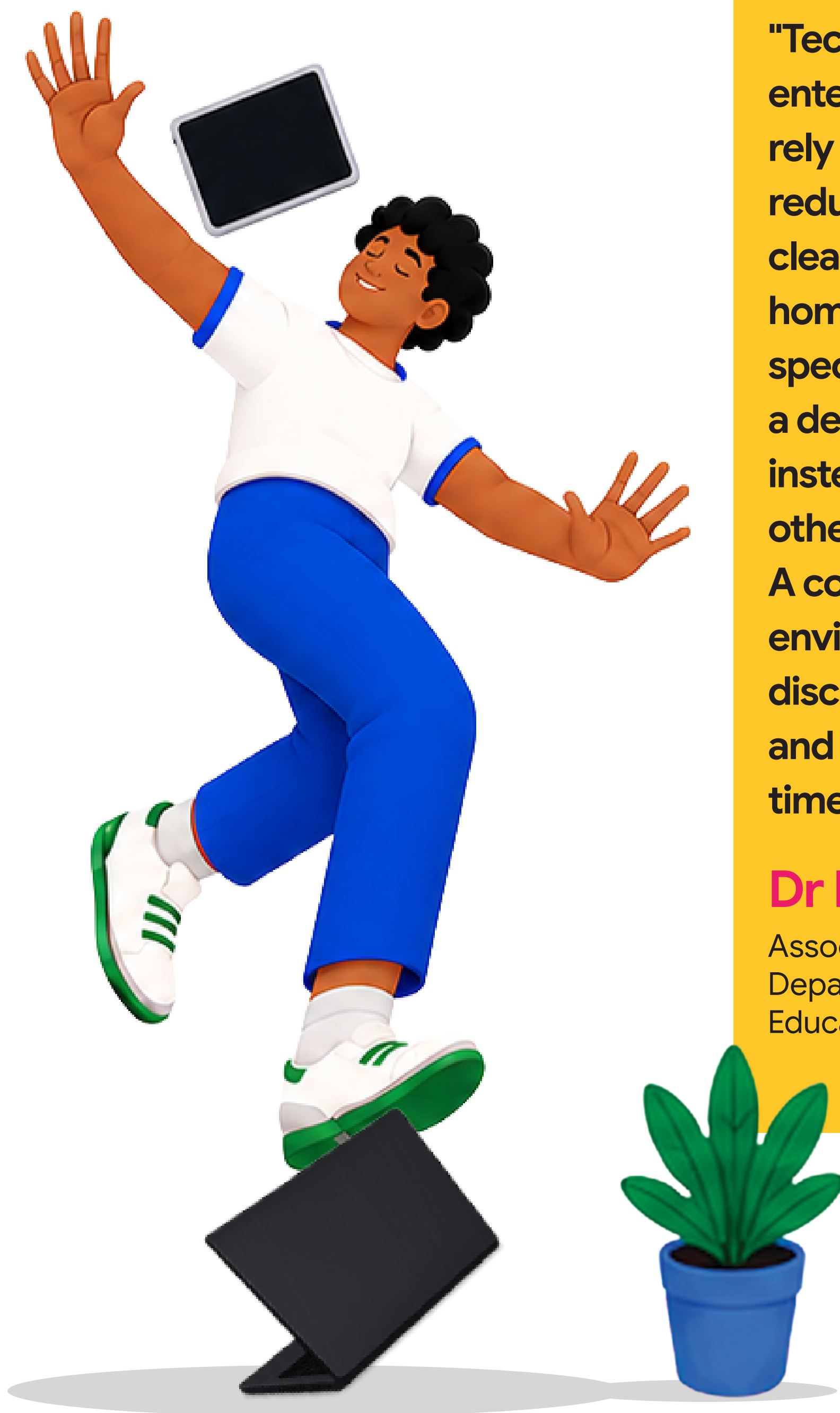
Set up specific physical zones for screen time, such as designate a study desk for online homework and keep the bedroom strictly screen-free. When you separate where your teen works and plays from where they rest, it naturally builds healthy boundaries.



PILLAR 1

SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Establishing a healthy balance with technology is more than setting strict, top-down rules or constantly negotiating device time. It's about engaging with your tween or teen to build habits that fit your family's daily life. Here's how you can guide your child toward a healthier relationship with the digital world and co-create a space where they can safely explore, learn, and relax.



"Technology isn't just for entertainment; children also rely on it for learning. To reduce digital burnout, create clear physical boundaries at home by designating a specific study area – such as a dedicated study desk – instead of using the bed or other multipurpose spaces. A consistent learning environment encourages discipline, improves focus, and helps balance screen time and daily tasks."

Dr Latha K

Associate Professor,
Department of Mental Health
Education, NIMHANS

Actionable Guidelines for Indian Households

Plan around the school year

- Instead of enforcing a fixed year-round screen rule, sit down with your child at the start of the school term to map out their weekly routine.
- Acknowledge that a healthy week includes time for studies, time for offline relaxation, and intentional time for digital connection and entertainment, and will shift during heavy exam weeks versus relaxed vacation blocks.
- Designing a flexible schedule together reduces friction because your child feels their academic pressure is understood.

Build their best feed, together

- Work with your child to personalize how their apps and devices behave based on their maturity level.
- Talk about curating a feed or a profile that reflects their actual hobbies - like coding, sports, or music - rather than letting them passively scroll.
- Frame this as building an online environment that serves their goals.



Set tech-free times and zones

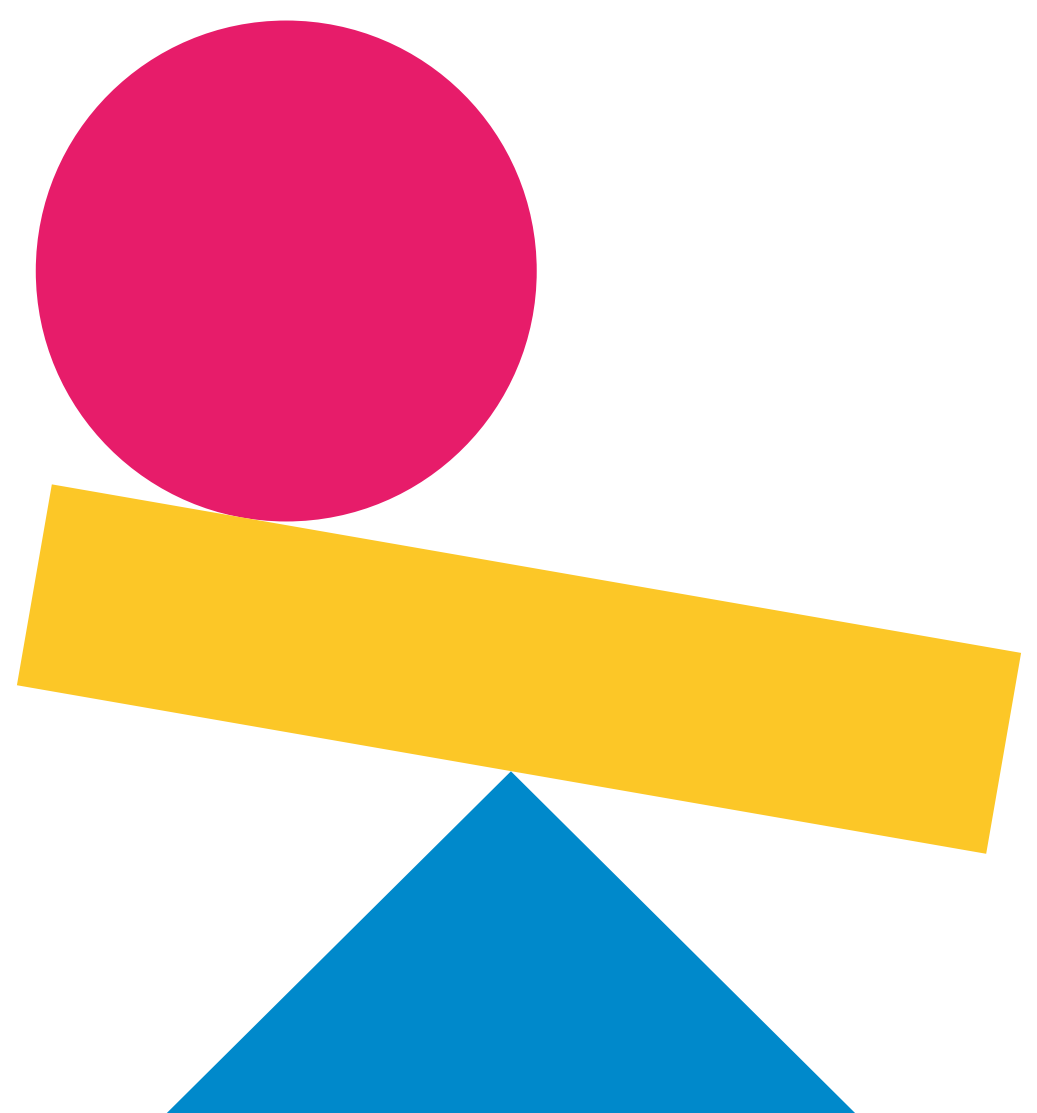
- Introduce tech-free transition windows that protect your family's wellbeing, such as during family dinners or an hour before bed.
- Explain 'why' you're setting these breaks. For instance, you could talk about how screens affect sleep or cause eye strain.
- Agree on reasonable daily limits or automated screen pauses so the device itself prompts the break, keeping your relationship collaborative.

Create rules for shared devices

- In homes where a single smartphone or tablet is shared among siblings or multiple generations, establish clear ground rules for sharing.
- Grandparents and relatives are often caregivers who share their devices with tweens and teens. Show them how to switch to the child's personalized profile before handing over the screen. This ensures your child always accesses a safe space, and maintains account privacy and security for all.
- Teach your child how to log into their own space or manage their history so their younger siblings aren't exposed to older content, and so their own study feeds remain organized and free from distractions.
- This protects the child's recommendation engine from adult content patterns and keeps protective guardrails intact.

Set clear passcode rules

- Talk to your tweens and teens about why device security is important, especially if younger siblings or relatives share a phone.
- Teach them to avoid sharing personal passwords or saving payment details on shared browsers.
- This respects everyone's privacy and helps protect the family from accidental purchases, unintended downloads or account changes.



PILLAR 2

NURTURING CRITICAL THINKING AND MEDIA LITERACY

As youth spend more time online, the goal is to give them the tools to think for themselves. Media literacy is about helping your child become an active, thoughtful explorer of the digital world. By encouraging curiosity and asking the right questions together, you can help them look beneath the surface of what they see - whether it's an online trend, an advertisement, or a piece of digital art - and build a strong, lifelong foundation for making smart, independent choices online.

"Shared viewing is the way forward. Families need to eat together and watch together. I strongly believe in a regular 'debriefing' approach to viewing: using open-ended conversations to ask what they liked, what they didn't, or if they saw anything that made them feel uncomfortable."

Dr Samir Parikh

Chairperson, Mental Health Program, Fortis Healthcare and Adayu Mindfulness



Actionable Guidelines for Indian Households

Deconstruct perfect online lives

- Talk openly with your child about how the content they see from online personalities or peers is often edited, or filtered.
- Encourage them to look at these posts with healthy curiosity rather than using them as a yardstick for their own life.
- Ask them gentle questions about what goes on behind the scenes of a beautifully shot video or photo to help them decouple online perfection from real life.

Decode the intent behind messages and promotions

- Help your child notice how content is often woven together with commercial intent.
- Point out how products are subtly placed in lifestyle videos or how certain trends are designed to make people buy things.
- Frame this not as a lecture about avoiding ads, but as a fun exercise in figuring out the ‘why’ behind what pops up on their screen.



Explore the evolving world of digital creation and AI

- With technology changing fast, chat with your child about how easily images, voices, and videos can now be created or altered by software.
- Instead of making them fearful, encourage them to become digital detectives. Teach them to look for inconsistencies, cross-check sensational claims with trusted sources, and think about how modified content can sometimes spread misinformation or affect real people.
- Help them to actively scan for automated platform labels, digital watermarks.

Teach them to create responsibly

- As your child learns to use AI and editing tools for creative projects, remind them they are responsible for what they make.
- Creating or sharing fake images or audio to mock a classmate or target someone online is bullying.
- Encourage them to pause and think whether their digital creations respect the dignity and privacy of others before hitting share.

Teach them how to be kind online

- Teaching tweens and teens to block harassment is important, but so is talking about their own behavior.
- Speak openly with your child about the weight of their digital footprint.
- Remind them that joining in on mean comments or ganging up on a peer is a choice. Help them understand that true confidence means walking away from drama and helping keep the internet safe for everyone.

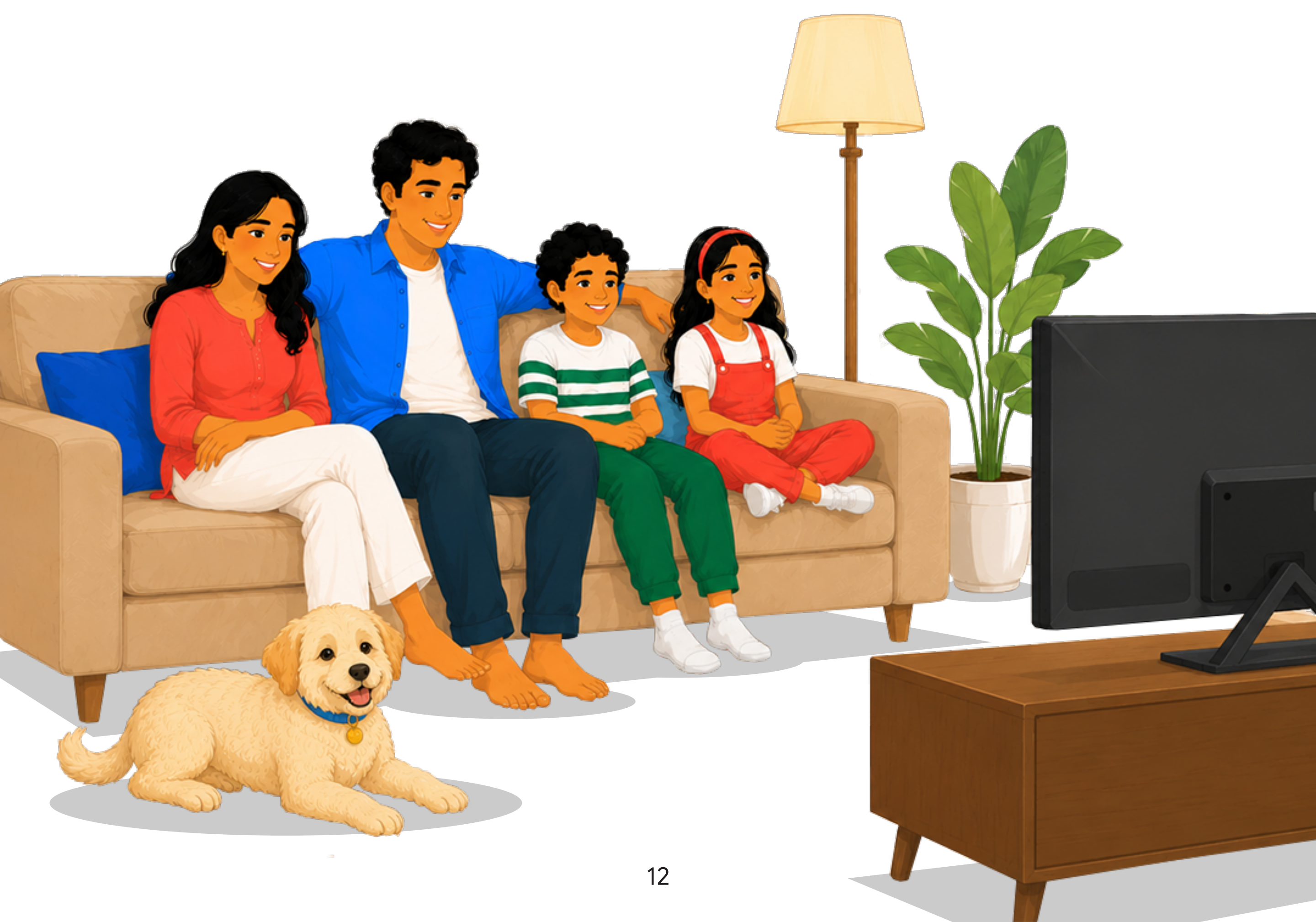


Spot scams and phishing links

- Teach your child to apply the same ‘digital detective’ mindset to unexpected messages, links, or alerts.
- Remind them that if an online offer looks too good to be true - like a message promising free game currency, exclusive streaming access, or a massive discount code - it’s probably a trick to steal their personal information.
- Make sure your child knows that you only enter a PIN or scan a code to send money, never to receive it.
- Remind them never to share sensitive information or security data (PINs, OTPs, passwords) over phone calls or messages to unknown numbers.
- Encourage them to double-check with you before clicking on unfamiliar links.

Swap roles and let them be the expert

- One of the best ways to build critical thinking is to let your child explain their digital world to you. Ask them to show you how a specific app decides what to show them next, or what makes a video go viral.
- By letting them take the lead in the conversation, you help them consciously reflect on their own digital habits and viewing choices.



PILLAR 3

SUPPORTING wellbeing AND ACADEMIC BALANCE

A tween or teen's digital life is deeply intertwined with their emotional and mental wellbeing, especially during times of intense academic preparation or seasonal stress. It's not just about the hours they spend online, it's about how that time makes them feel. Paying attention to their emotions is the key to true digital wellbeing. By focusing on their emotional cues and treating technology as a tool that can support - rather than disrupt - their goals, we can help tweens and teens maintain an internal sense of balance, focus, and peace of mind during the busy school year.

"For some children, especially those with anxiety or ADHD, technology is a coping mechanism. If you suddenly take away their screen, you are taking away their way to cope. You have to address the underlying anxiety or vulnerability before you just remove the device."

**Dr Manoj
Kumar Sharma**

Professor of Clinical Psychology,
SHUT clinic (Service for Healthy
use of Technology), NIMHANS



Actionable Guidelines for Indian Households

Create a distraction-free study environment

- Recognize that platforms are invaluable study companions for Indian students tackling tough school subjects, skill-building, or competitive exam preparation. Help your child consciously organize their study environment.
- Discuss setting up dedicated, distraction-free profiles or muted notifications during revision blocks, ensuring their online space transitions seamlessly from a place of leisure to a focused learning zone.

Look beyond the block to watch for emotional cues

- Pay attention to how your child acts after logging off. Notice physical signs of exhaustion, such as eye strain or erratic sleep patterns, as well as emotional shifts like heightened irritability or sudden withdrawal.
- Use these observations as an entry point for a gentle, supportive conversation about how their digital habits are impacting their energy and mood.



Find the real reason for increased screen time, together

- Understand that a sudden spike in screen time or continuous scrolling is often a symptom of something deeper, rather than the root problem itself.
- It might be their way of coping with upcoming exam anxiety, peer friction, or seasonal pressure.
- Approach your child with empathy to help them identify what is driving their need to escape, and figure out healthier ways to unpack that stress together.

Teach them smart digital spending habits

- As your child begins managing their own pocket money and making independent choices, use it as a chance to build real-world financial skills.
- Have an open conversation about setting an intentional monthly budget for digital hobbies, apps, or entertainment.
- You can work together to track their spending patterns so they learn to avoid impulsive in-app purchases and understand the value of money.

Remind them it's okay to ask for help

- Remind your child that navigating the digital world can sometimes feel overwhelming, and that it is okay to take a step back when content feels heavy or distressing.
- Maintain open, non-judgmental conversations about online experiences.
- Normalize the idea of using available online wellbeing resources, and remind them that authoritative, local helpline networks are always accessible if they or a friend ever need professional, confidential support to manage mental health stress.



OPERATIONALIZING DIALOGUE

QUICK CONVERSATION STARTERS

The best conversations are casual, not confrontational. Create a safe space where tweens and teens feel heard, rather than cross-examined. Use these starters during dinner, in the car, or anytime you have a quiet moment.

Exploring their online interests

“I love how much creative stuff is out there now. What’s a cool hobby, creator, or new video you’ve run into this week that really caught your attention?”

Tailoring your digital feed

“How do you manage your settings or choose what to click on to make sure your feed stays matched to your real hobbies and goals?”

Navigating Digital Authenticity

“That clip making the rounds today looked incredibly lifelike, but it got me thinking about how easy it is to alter things with AI now. How do you and your friends usually figure out if a viral video is the real deal or edited?”

Co-Creating Shared Family Spaces

“With the busy school term starting, I want to make sure I’m stepping away from my work notifications in the evenings to unwind. Let’s look at our screen habits together and figure out a realistic plan to protect our family dinner time.”

"Tech conflicts usually start with communication gaps and abrupt rules—like suddenly shutting off the Wi-Fi or taking away devices without warning. Instead of forcing sudden restrictions that make your child feel misunderstood and isolated, work with them to set boundaries together."

Dr Manoj Kumar Sharma

Professor of Clinical Psychology, SHUT clinic (Service for Healthy use of Technology), NIMHANS



Establishing Shared Boundary Rules

“I want to make sure I'm taking proper breaks from work notifications. Let's figure out how we can adjust our account timers together to protect our family dinner time.”

On Digital Scams

“I just got a strange forward message saying I won something. Do you or your friends ever see weird or scammy links like that? How do you usually handle them?”

On Financial Accountability

“While we're planning your school budget for books and supplies, let's also look at a small monthly allowance for any hobbies you want to explore this semester. We could explore classes, channels or courses. How do you want to keep track of subscriptions and supplies it so we both know it's being used wisely?”

On Responsible Creation and Interaction

“When things get heated or people start making fun of someone in a thread, how do you and your friends decide when to step back and make sure you aren't adding fuel to the fire?”

Replacing Screen Time with ‘Energy Capsules’

“I want us all to find ways to step away from our screens and recharge in the real world this week. What is an offline activity, sport, or fun project in the kitchen we can do together to burn off some steam?”

The goal isn't to take the keys away, it's to teach them how to drive safely. By working together, you can help your tweens and teens

**BUILD
HEALTHY^{AND}
BALANCED
DIGITAL
LIVES.** 🌱

