

# TEENS AND ELECTRONICS

*A Mom's Guide to  
Creating Balance*

LISA GAY NICHOLS

**DEAR MOMS,**

*I know you're between a rock and a hard place.*

It may feel too hard and too late to put limits on your teen's use of electronics.

However, if electronics use is causing a constant battle in your home; if your teen is ignoring school, chores, hygiene, sleep, and/or eating; if they are depressed, grumpy or angry beyond normal teenager emotions; if it appears that they use video games or their phone to escape, it's time.

It's never too late.

The hard part will be dealing with the fallout as they go through withdrawals. The hard part will be sticking to the new rules until they become accepted.

It may not seem like it's worth it. But I know firsthand that it is.

There are many reasons -- including your teen's physical, emotional, and social health as well as your own wellbeing -- why it's worth the hassle.

This booklet will walk you through how to do it. Because I already know how much you care (you showed it by downloading this booklet), I have complete confidence that you'll be able to set the limits that your teen and your family needs.

All the best,

**LISA GAY NICHOLS**

Author, Life Coach, EFT and Matrix Reimprinting Practitioner

# WHAT WE'LL COVER

*Doing a little planning now will help you through it.*

Does this sound familiar?

You've asked your teen a million times to do something. They grunt at you while keeping their eyes glued to their screen. You come back later and...it's still not done.

And you've finally had it! "I've had it!" you yell. "Give me that #@\$% controller/phone/keyboard/remote! You can't have it back for a month! I'm sick of this!"

And so starts the battle of wills between you and your teen -- until your loving mom's heart starts to think that you overreacted or their nagging wears you down and they get their electronics back.

Rather than trying to create limits in the heat of the moment like this, I recommend that you prepare yourself so that you have the best possible chance to reduce your teen's electronics use and bring more balance to their lives and more harmony to your home.

This booklet will cover how in five steps:

- Step 1: Get yourself in a strong space
- Step 2: Find your why
- Step 3: Connect with your teen
- Step 4: Create your plan
- Step 5: Put the plan into action

Finally, we'll talk about what to do if your teen's reliance on technology has gone too far.

I'll also provide:

- A list of activities they can do instead of electronics
- A list of apps that track and/or restrict electronics use

# STEP 1: GET TO A STRONG SPACE

*Doing your own work is always the first step.*

Honestly, tactics to reduce your teen's technology use will only be effective if:

- You're willing to withstand the blowback that is most likely going to come your way for however long it lasts.
- You're willing and able to hold to the new rules/boundaries no matter what (see first bullet point).

You'll be told that you're the worst mother, that none of the other parents have rules like this, etc. etc. Your teen may even threaten you: they'll go live with their other parent, or self-harm, or buy their own electronics so then you'll have no authority over them.

It will be the opposite of fun.

And it will be crucial that you follow through. If you're not ready to hold your ground, don't start making changes until you are. Your teen needs to know that you will not back down.

This is a huge part of what held me back when my son was struggling with tech addiction. I couldn't hold my ground for a day, let alone a few weeks. I was frustrated, at a loss, felt that I must be wrong for wanting to limit technology since no one else had a problem. My son had a strong personality and could easily overwhelm me. I felt alone and bereft, because in my heart I knew there was a problem but I didn't feel like I could make changes.

So the first step is: Get yourself ready. Work through your emotions around their technology use and around what might happen when you impose limits -- guilt, fear, frustration, helplessness, etc. Also work through any beliefs that don't serve you, that keep you from feeling empowered, able to hold boundaries, and believing in yourself as a parent.

Here's a BIG belief you may need to work on: technology is a privilege, not a right. Many parents feel so helpless because they think they can't take technology away -- that their hands are tied. This is a lie. You have every right to limit or even eliminate it completely if that's what you believe is best for your teen and your family.

There's something else that you need to look at: your own technology use. If it is more than you want it to be or than it should be, clean up your act before you ask your teen to. To be clear, I'm talking about technology for entertainment, not work or family coordination. But this can mean everything from texting, playing games on your phone, Facebook scrolling, Netflix binging, and even volunteer work that is technology based.

Maybe start with replacing one technology habit with something else, such as going for a walk before you sit down to watch the next episode of Jane The Virgin or leaving your phone and tablet outside of your room at night. Or you may decide you want to do a full detox for a day, a weekend, or a week or two.

A benefit of cutting back your own technology use is that you'll have a better understanding of how your teen will feel when their use becomes more restricted.

It also shows them that you aren't asking them to do anything you're not willing to do, and it eliminates one of the things they can throw at you (can't you hear "You're on your phone all the time; you're such a hypocrite" already?).

### *Get support if you need it.*

This is the part that I specialize in. I help moms clear out what gets triggered by their teenagers. I help them get to an empowered, positive state so they can hold their boundaries and react in ways that don't fuel conflict.

I do this through a combination of coaching, which is all about getting to what you want, and Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT, aka tapping), which is a magical tool for eliminating emotional charges and limiting beliefs.

So if you know this is something that you could use some help with, email me directly at [lisa@lisagaynichols.com](mailto:lisa@lisagaynichols.com) to schedule a Parenting Your Teen Breakthrough session as my gift to you.

## STEP 2: FINDING YOUR WHY

### *What do you want instead?*

Many moms are frustrated by the lack of balance in their teens' lives. Because they spend so much time on their screens, teens often have no other interests; underperform in school; don't eat healthy, go outside or exercise; and don't see friends in real life.

The impact on the family can be huge, too. Family life can end up revolving around electronics. There can be little interaction (we miss our kids!), little cooperation, and a lack of courtesy. While these are often normal teen behaviors, they can be made significantly worse when the teen is online all the time.

I lived through all of this and more when my son was a teenager. I wish we had bit the bullet and set limits so much earlier! It caused so much heartache and stress in our home. For all of these reasons, I wish I had been the "bad guy" and insisted that technology limits be enforced or they would be gone for good.

There can be other impacts of technology overuse as well:

- Teens use video games, social media and porn to escape and/or feel better about themselves. They think it helps them deal with anxiety and stress, but it does the opposite. By escaping into video games or social media when they are unhappy or stressed, they don't learn how to manage these feelings or how to be resilient.
- Their identity can end up being tied to their technology -- levels in games, likes or number of friends on social media, etc. And when this happens, they can't have a healthy relationship with technology. They stop figuring out who they are because their sense of self and their focus is on one thing and one thing only.

- Video games and social media flood our brains with dopamine, which shuts down the prefrontal cortex and reduces natural production of dopamine. Video games and social media are designed to continually give hits of dopamine at variable times, which leads to a compulsion loop. This impairs impulse control and makes it harder to retain information, focus in school, interact socially, relate to others, and regulate emotions. Development of other parts of the brain is stunted too.
- There is a correlation between depression and anxiety and overuse of technology for video games, porn, and social media. Some say that it's hard to prove correlation; for example, some suggest that people who are prone to depression and/or anxiety are more likely to use electronics. But I believe there is a correlation. We don't need scientists to tell us what we see in our own homes.
- There can be serious long-term consequences of excessive technology use, including what is called i-Disorder (there's a book with this title by Larry Rosen). Too much screen time and screens too early can rewire the brain to create a personality disorder, including OCD, addiction, schizoid characteristics, narcissism, and anti-social disorders.

BTW, no one should feel bad about how addicted or obsessed our teens -- or ourselves -- are with our screens. This is exactly what the game and social media developers intend. They are very good at figuring out how to keep people on their products, even hiring neuroscientists to help them, and are getting even better at it (TikTok appears to be the best at it so far).

And you are far from alone. Many, many parents are dealing with this issue. Technology has become a source of stress, conflict, and despair in many homes.

So step 2 is to figure out your why. Why do you want your teen to reduce their use of electronics? What change do you want to see in your home?

You may want to state this in terms of your values, such as "In this family, we think it's important to get enough sleep" or "In this family, we value connecting with each other during mealtimes."

A note here that some of you have co-parents (at home or living elsewhere) who do not share your goal of putting limits on electronics. This makes a hard situation even harder.

- If the co-parent lives separately and is not open to operating with the same limits, all you can do is set up the rules in your home, emphasizing the benefits to your teen, and do your best to stay firm, confident, and hopeful.
- If the co-parent lives in the home, you may need to do what you have to do to get your point across. Looking back, I wish I had thrown an absolute fit and made it a big thing so that I could get my husband and the kids on board. You may also need to find compromise with your co-parent before you bring up the need for new rules with your teen.

## *Why You Need to Find Your Why*

Being specific about your why can help you implement the new limits.

- It will help you know what limits to put into place. If your wish is to have family dinner together four nights a week, if you want your teen to exercise more, if you want your teen to be better about doing chores, or if you want all of the above, this will inform what rules to put into place.
- Focusing on your why can help you stand your ground. You'll be able to remind yourself "This is why I'm doing this" when your teen is having a hard time accepting the changes.

Finding your why is key to successfully implementing limits on technology use, and if you need help clarifying it, I can help you get clear.

Here's what one mom said after setting limits: "After a week's worth of detox from gaming and phones, my sweet, loving, and caring sons came back to me. They make eye contact, tell us jokes, and want to hang out with us. It's a miracle!"

I can't promise this will happen after a week or a month, but it's more likely than if you keep things the way they are.

# STEP 3: CONNECT WITH YOUR TEEN

## *What's going on with them?*

When I was a teen, I had two habits: picking on my arms and reading for hours and hours.

I did these because:

- I was anxious and didn't know I had anxiety.
- I felt powerless about the emotional turmoil in my home.
- I had learned that it was safer to stay under the radar so I did things that kept me still.
- I hated myself and didn't know what to do with all the misery I felt.
- I was bored and could zone out.

I don't know your teen's reasons for spending so much time on electronics. They may not be this dramatic; maybe it's just a habit or what they find most fun.

Or maybe it's because it's the one way they feel some level of control over their life. Or where they can forget about feeling like they don't belong, ignore all the anger they feel and don't understand, or see themselves as competent and valued.

Being a teenager is really hard. It can be easier to check out than to deal with everything: the expectations of parents and school, the upended social rules, the emotions, the physical changes, the new thoughts, the lack of control.

Not to mention that they have had trauma in their life. It may not be really big trauma, like abuse or being bullied or an accident, but a collection of smaller ones that affected how they feel about themselves or the world. We all have beliefs from childhood that we decided were true (from our limited experience and still forming brain) when something unpleasant happened.

A traumatic moment in my life was when my mom commented on how little dirt I had collected sweeping my grandmother's floor. Thinking of that moment could make me cry for decades because I took it as meaning that I wasn't good enough and never did anything right.

You probably don't know which incidents impacted your teen the most. They are probably events that you forgot as soon as they happened. But for your teen, they changed everything.

So it's helpful going into the new rules around electronics with compassion. You don't have to understand everything that's going on with your teen, but just know that there's a lot more going on under the surface than it seems.

If you don't already, try to connect with what they're doing online. One of my friends learned how to play Fortnite so she had something to talk to her son about. You may not need to go that far, but watch them play their games. Make a TikTok video or watch YouTube videos with them. Ask if anything funny has come up on their social media.

Keeping computers, consoles, and tablets in common areas can help with this (also because it removes some of the possibility of them keeping things secret).

This may be the hardest thing I'll suggest to you! Whatever they're doing may not interest you in the least, and you have your own interests and life to live. But it can really help. If your spouse is also a gamer and plays with your kid, you may think that's their thing and you don't need to be involved. But it will still help you understand and connect better by showing interest. And your teen may just love being the one to teach you all about what they find fascinating; I know my son can talk for hours about Warhammer 40k.

Having some idea of your teen's perspectives can help you be more patient, compassionate, and understanding of your teen's reactions to the new rules and help turn the tide when they are struggling.

# STEP 4: CREATE YOUR PLAN

## *What steps can you take?*

The best way to make sure this plan works is to engage your teen in the planning.

One mom got so fed up with the constant battle that one day she blurted out to her teen that HE could set his own limits. Her husband looked at her in horror until she explained that their son could come up with his own schedule but he had to:

- Do the research.
- Be able to justify his decisions.
- Identify consequences if he exceeded the limits.
- Present his plan to them for input.

When he came back with his plan, it wasn't much different than what the parents wanted in the first place.

This is one way to do it. Another is to hammer out a plan with your teen in a family meeting. A third way is to create your plan without including your teenager; this may be easier upfront but will make implementation a lot harder.

However you decide to do it, identify your must-haves before talking to your teen. Be clear about what the plan covers in term of devices (game consoles, TVs, phones, tablets, etc.) and type of use (e.g., entertainment such as social media, gaming, surfing, gambling, and porn but not education or some social uses).

Make sure they know that what you're aiming for is balance with plenty of other activities and self-care mixed in with an appropriate level of screen time.

Here are some ideas of limits you may want to include in your plan. Remember it's easier to start with a stricter plan and then ease up when you see things are going well.

- Meals are screen free (including TVs and including the parents).
- Work before play as a family value. In other words, chores and homework are complete before any screen time.
- Fewer screen hours during the week and more on the weekend.
- Electronics are turned off at a specific time each night (it's best if it's at least one hour before lights out).
- Certain electronics (TVs, game consoles, and computers) are not allowed in bedrooms and others (phones, tablets) are not allowed after a specific time at night.
- Parents are allowed passwords.
- Apps that restrict or monitor use must be installed on devices. (See the list at the end of this booklet.)
- Calling or talking in person is preferred over texting.
- There are times set aside for being completely screen free (e.g., one day a week or one weekend a month).

If you try to set electronics limits when you're fed up and angry, you're more likely to go overboard and threaten to take their phone away for a month or throw their console away. And then you're stuck either following through or backing down! Over-the-top consequences like these aren't effective.

Instead, include consequences in your plan so you all know what will happen ahead of time if the limits are not followed. You may even want to include consequences for too much whining and complaining about the new limits!

Here are some ideas for consequences:

- Take away screen privileges for the next day.
- Assign extra chores that must be completed before they are allowed back on screens.
- Identify a good deed they must perform before they are allowed back on.
- Tighten the rules until they earn privileges back by following the limits for a specific period of time.
- Identify if there is a way for the teen to make reparations.
- Restrict their use of the car (if they drive) or certain activities that you do for them.
- A combination of the above, depending on the severity or repetition of the breach.

Your plan can also include ways for them to earn more screen time, such as doing something extra around the house or yard.

Be sure to also plan on praising your teens. Tell them that you believe in them to be able to make this change. Thank them for their cooperation. Appreciate the small steps that they make, like not complaining or asking for more screen time for a day. Don't go overboard; just acknowledge the progress so they know you see their effort.

You may not believe it from their behavior, but teens need and want boundaries. It helps them feel safe. It can help them make good choices. Plus, when you help them go through something hard like withdrawing from electronics, they learn that they can do hard things. For these and other reasons, you're doing the right thing.

# STEP 5: PUT YOUR PLAN INTO ACTION

## *Making it work*

Once you've agreed on a plan, pick a date and get started.

If you included your teen in the planning, this should help the initial adjustment period be a little easier. You may still get pushback, complaining, whining, negotiating, and defiance.

If there's defiance and the new limits are not being followed, give the consequences immediately. Do not give second chances.

If you're getting complaining or whining, or your teen is trying to make you feel guilty or like "the worst parent ever," here's a way to handle it:

- Acknowledge what's true for them. For example: "I hear that you think this is unfair."
- Follow up with a "nevertheless" statement. For example: "Nevertheless, these are the rules we agreed to" or "Nevertheless, these are our family values." Keep saying "nevertheless" statements and eventually they'll get so sick of hearing them, they'll stop badgering you.

It will take time for your teen to adjust. There will be good days and bad days. There will be setbacks. Remember that it won't last forever! Your compassion, patience and calm will go a long way toward helping them move through it. Celebrate and praise when things go right; encourage and stand firm on the difficult days.

And remember, you are not alone! So many parents are dealing with this exact issue right now. It's a very common parenting challenge; everything you and your teen are going through is very normal right now.

Here is how some parents described their experience:

"I know the next week is going to be like watching a drug addict without their fix and I'm not looking forward to it ONE BIT!!! I love this child more than anything on earth, but today.....today he is a defiant arsehole who I'm struggling to like. I'm doing this so we can find a way to live harmoniously together and I can learn to like him again."

"There will be withdrawal symptoms. Lots of complaining, sometimes threats and then whining of boredom and then annoying as hell, almost making you wish you never took things away. Don't cave in the first few days!! There is a relearning process of how to entertain themselves like when they were toddlers."

"It's HAAARDDD!! You have to be dedicated, and trust he's not going to break a TV or something equally or more upsetting. Also, give opportunities for trust, like allow texting friends and family, but no internet, depending on his level of socialization at this moment in time. Have protocols lined up for different issues. Also have ideas of things to do ready to go."

"First day or two is ROUGH!!! He finally got his phone back, with new automatic time restrictions set, on Friday!"

"I told my 16-year-old that this IS happening, but we will work together on what reasonable limits look like. AFTER he got done pouting (and I showed him what NO screen time looks like 😞) we did come to an agreement with some healthy conversation. We've adjusted it a few times and in certain situations. Discussing healthy limits: during homework time, a set time in the evening, and charging away from the bedroom at night."

"Mine were as mean as a hornet when I took their phones cold turkey for behavior. It's been almost a year and they have gotten some privileges back but not all, and it's like different kids. I allow limited phone and text to close friends (I know they are teens and need social interaction). Only one kid has earned Instagram back, and it is only for family and a limited amount of approved friends and no use of social media messages."

# WHEN HELP IS NEEDED

## *Finding support to overcome screen overuse*

You should look into getting your teen help outside the family when:

- There are signs of a disorder or an addiction. You're looking for signs of dysfunction, such as lying, significant sleep disruption (e.g., gaming 18 to 20 hours a day), significant weight gain or loss, and no friends in real life.
- You're not able to enforce the limits after trying for a period of time.
- Your teen threatens violence toward you, other family members, or themselves. Note: If your teen is violent to you, others, or themselves, call the police. Do not hesitate. Do not think "oh they're a good kid at heart" and feel bad for calling the police. You and everyone in your family deserve to live in a safe environment and your teen's behavior is a cry for help, that they cannot handle how they feel about themselves and their lives right now.

The sooner you get help, the better. Even if you're just seeing signs of an unbalanced life, take steps right away.

Don't feel bad about needing to ask for help. Again, this is a very common issue right now; there is nothing to be embarrassed or ashamed about.

Here are some ideas for where to look for help:

- A therapeutic educational consultant. A good one will know local resources as well as wilderness or residential therapeutic programs that work with technology addiction
- A therapist (some specialize in technology overuse) or parenting coach who can help you as you go through this experience
- Your health insurance or doctor
- Employee Assistance Plan if offered by your employer
- Internet and Technology Addicts Anonymous (<https://internetaddictsanonymous.org/>)
- Books and articles

# ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES

## *A list in case they need ideas*

A caveat about this list: try not to give your teen ideas unless they ask for them. Let them try to come up with their own ways of stopping the boredom. If they're driving you crazy, ask if you can give them some ideas, and then give them five or six as prompts.

You may want to allow your teen to earn extra time on electronics when they complete some of these activities. You may also want to include educational activities that are electronics based, such as learning a new dance (not on TikTok) or cooking instruction.

Board games  
Card games, poker  
Walking the dog (if you have one)  
Bike ride  
Shooting basketball  
Throwing a football or baseball  
Create their own soccer ball  
Handball  
Choreograph a fake sword or Jedi fight  
Pillow fight  
Darts  
Air hockey  
Pool  
Ping pong  
Dancing  
Start a garden  
Photo shoots  
Trampoline  
Make a giant Jenga or chess set

Create an outdoor movie screen  
Nerf gun battle  
Bug hunt  
Puzzles  
Help a neighbor  
Bake or cook  
Create their own smoothie flavor  
Make their own trail mix  
Scavenger hunt  
Fishing  
Paper airplane races  
Skateboarding  
Swimming  
Build a go kart  
Knit or crochet  
Read a book or magazine  
Create their own manga  
Plan a family weekend trip  
Make a list of places they'd like to go  
Put on a play, including designing the costumes and stage sets  
Build a fort

# APPS THAT LIMIT OR TRACK SCREEN USE

## *Put technology to good use*

Your plan may include the use of an app to limit or monitor screen time, which apps your teen can use, and who they can communicate with. Some apps also offer location tracking and content filtering.

Not everything can be monitored, such as iMessage and Snapchat. Your teenager can also delete some of these apps without you being notified. And the kids are so smart! They can either figure out how to get around restrictions or their friends will tell them how, so be sure to include consequences for this in your plan.

Each of the following have pros and cons that you will need to research to pick the one that works for your family.

- Life360
- Bark
- Circle
- MM Guardian
- TeenSafe
- Webwatcher
- Family Link
- Qustodio
- Net Nanny
- Google Family Link
- Microsoft Family Safety

Other ideas:

- Screen time on Apple phones allows you to set limits by app, content, and who can be communicated with (if you have iCloud contacts set up)
- Check with your internet provider (for example, how to turn off the internet at a certain time each night)
- Check the instructions for your router (for example, the Google Internet Box can be turned off from an app on your phone)

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Lisa Gay Nichols*

As a certified life coach and EFT & Matrix Reimprinting practitioner, Lisa helps moms have less conflict and more cooperation from their teenagers.

As a parent of a former difficult teen, Lisa brings deep understanding and insightful strategies to her role in helping parents navigate the often frustrating, exhausting, and scary journey that is raising teenagers.

When dealing with her teenage son, Lisa followed the advice of many experts, including schools, doctors, and others, on how to "fix" her teen. What was missing was the support and coaching for her, the mom, by someone who had been through it. She has become the resource she wanted for the parents who are currently struggling to keep their teens safe and on track.

Lisa is the bestselling author of two books on parenting teens. She is a former journalist, bank vice president, and nonprofit board president. She enjoys spending time with her family, friends and three cats, volunteering, traveling, and being a taste tester for her husband's winery.

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