

Screen Time Rules That Stick

Set device rules with your kids the way you'd set a team norm

Team norms that actually stick get written by the team, posted somewhere everyone can see, and come with a known process for exceptions. Norms handed down from above and never written anywhere die within a week. Screen time rules follow the exact same pattern. Rules you impose unilaterally get tested constantly. Rules the kids helped write, that live somewhere visible, with a clear “here’s how you ask for extra time” path, hold up a lot better than the ones that exist only in your head and get relitigated every single evening.

What you need: twenty minutes with your kid or kids, a whiteboard or piece of paper, and a spot to post the finished rules.

The steps

1. **Ask them what they think is fair before you propose anything.** (5 minutes) You’ll be surprised how reasonable most kids are when they’re co-writing instead of receiving. Start there, not with your draft.
2. **Set the actual numbers together.** (5 minutes) Weekday limit, weekend limit, device-free times (dinner, an hour before bed). Write down real numbers, not “not too much.”
3. **Define the exception path.** (3 minutes) What happens on a birthday, a sick day, a long car ride. Naming it in advance means you’re not negotiating from scratch every time it comes up.
4. **Make it visible.** (2 minutes) Post it somewhere everyone walks past. A rule that only lives in your memory isn’t a rule, it’s an opinion you have to keep repeating.
5. **Agree on what happens when it’s broken.** (2 minutes) One consistent, boring consequence beats three different angry ones depending on your mood that day.
6. **Put a monthly review on the calendar.** (3 minutes) Ages change, apps change, what worked in September might not fit by December. Revisit it on purpose instead of only when something blows up.

This month's rules

Day type	Limit	Device-free window
Weekday		
Weekend		
Exception path (how to ask for more) 		
What happens if it's broken 		
Next review date 		

When it goes sideways

A kid tests the rule the very first Tuesday. That's not the rule failing, that's normal. Use the consistent consequence you agreed on and move on without a lecture.

Siblings want different limits by age and it turns into a fairness fight. Say it plainly: different ages, different rules, same process. Fair doesn't mean identical.

You're the one who breaks the device-free window first. Own it out loud. Kids forgive an adult who admits it a lot faster than one who pretends it didn't happen.

Rules nobody wrote together are just rules you have to enforce alone. Co-written ones enforce themselves more often than you'd think.