



Recommendations for Families in the Digital Age

Many children and young people use digital devices, such as computers, tablets, and smartphones, daily. Our digital age creates many opportunities but also challenges for the well-being of children and young people who are learning to cope.

The task of parents and guardians is to support and guide the balanced growth and development of children and young people, and their well-being in their everyday digital life. The adult is responsible for ensuring that the conditions for the use of digital devices are created for the child and young person in such a way that the child's everyday life is balanced and promotes well-being. [The rights of a child](#) in our digital world are [responsibilities of the parent](#).

The recommendations of the city of Oulu regarding screen time are based on the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Institute of Health and Welfare as well as national and international studies. A multidisciplinary group of experts participated in the preparation of the recommendations. It consulted children and young people of different ages as well as parents and guardians in the preparation of the recommendations.

In addition to parents and guardians, also other bodies working with children and young people can use the recommendations. In the recommendations, the word 'child' refers to children and young people under the age of 18. The term 'parents' refers to parents and guardians.

1. Learn about digital media and be present in child's everyday life also digitally



- 1** Have a **positive attitude** towards your child's or teenager's use of digital devices and digital media.
- 2** Show **interest in your child's life** by asking daily for example: What fun things have happened today on social media or in the game? Is there something you are concerned about?
- 3** Show **each other your respective skills** and ways to use digital devices and teach each other more about how to use them – what things do you know well and what content, games, services and apps are important to you right now?
- 4** Encourage **your child** and teenager to tell you what kind of emotions the different media content and games awakens and discuss the emotions together.

Checklist of things to discuss with your child:

- **What** does the child or young person like doing online or on the phone?
- **What kind of games** are their favourites? Why?
- **What apps**, gaming communities and social media services are important for your child or teenager? What do they do with them? With whom?
- **What things** does your child feel good at and with what things do they feel they need help? What are their media skills that you as parent are proud of?
- **What media content** evokes positive emotions? What kind of content evokes negative emotions?
- **What kind of things** relating to the use of digital devices have a positive impact on your child's self-esteem? What things have a negative impact? Does the child place value on themselves, for example, through social media beauty standards or ideals or the number of followers on social networks?

Info box:

By being present in the digital daily life of your child or teenager and discussing related topics on a daily basis, they become part of your family interactions and it will be easier to discuss even difficult issues.



2. Agree on the family's digital rules together



- 1** **Agree with your child** the boundaries and rules to ensure a balanced everyday life. When you agree on the rules together, everyone will be able to commit to the rules.
- 2** **Some of the rules** of digital daily life can be for the whole family and some for the child. Those should **take into account the child's age and development level**, as well as what **applications, content and games the child is allowed to use and for how long**.
- 3** **The City of Oulu recommends** that children and young people of school age use digital devices in their free time for **at most** two hours a day and children younger than that **at most** one hour a day.
- 4** **The City of Oulu recommends** that at least one hour before bedtime should be free from digital devices.

Checklist of things to discuss with your child:

- **When and in what situations** they are allowed to use digital devices and when not? (E.g., meals, family times, traffic)
- **When and how** should they take breaks from digital media or take a full day away from technology?
- **Do you take turns** using the family digital devices? How does that work?
- **What kind of permissions** do children and teenagers need to ask the adults relating to digital devices?
What are the family policies for downloading new apps or mobile games?
- **What is acceptable** behaviour online, in social media or on gaming platforms?
- **In what situations** will you use phone location tracking in your family?
- **How much time** is your child allowed to spend on digital devices in a day when compared to other everyday activities and proportional to promoting your child's well-being? (E.g., exercise, rest, household chores, homework)
- **What time** do you put your phone off before bedtime? Where do you keep the phone at night? (E.g. phone park)
- **What happens** if the family's digital rules are not adhered to?

Info box:

- By adjusting the security settings for smartphones, you can control, for example, the amount of screen time available, the content that the child can access, the use of apps and the installation of new software, e.g., Family link and the Screen Time function.
- You can also decide on the use of phone locating apps in your family. The child has the right to privacy, so their use must be agreed on together and the child should be aware of them.



- Using digital devices in the evening can delay sleep and reduce sleep quality for both children and adults.

3. Teach your child online safety skills

- 1 **Follow and monitor** age limits. Age limits secure media content suitable for children's development.
- 2 **Help your child** set profiles private and passwords secure. Passwords should not be shared with others.
- 3 **Tell your child** not to share your personal information, such as phone number, address, or photos to others. Encourage your child to tell you if someone has asks for those.
- 4 **It is good** for the child to know that it is not appropriate to share, for example, scantily clad or nude photos or other offensive content of themselves or others online. Tell the child when they may become guilty of a crime online, e.g. if they share photos or be complicit in bullying.
- 5 **Tell the child** that all content on the Internet and in games is not intended for children. Remind them that they do not have to watch disconcerting or scary content.
- 6 **Allow app installation** and purchases only with parental permission.
- 7 **Teach the child** to be critical of media content. Online and in games, people can cheat and pretend to be something other than what they really are. Encourage the child to tell you if someone they do not know contacts them.
- 8 **Tell your child** about the potential cyber threats of smart devices and the importance of information security. Discuss phishing and attacks on electronic systems together.
- 9 **Discuss influence operations** that aim to influence opinions and attitudes, e.g. by means of misleading and false information.
- 10 **Encourage your child** and teenager to always tell a safe adult if something in digital media has caused unpleasant feelings, worries or left them wondering.
- 11 **Teach your child** Internet safety instructions: Save offending messages, contacts and users with a screenshot. Report them to the service administration. Block and delete the contact. Tell the police about serious situations. Compliment your child if they have to courage to tell about their fears or worries.

Checklist of things to discuss with your child:

- **What age limits** do different apps and games have and why are there age limits?
- **What is a good password?** How will you make sure the passwords, bank and app purchase settings are safe?
- **What kinds of information** or photos about yourself and others you can share and what information you should not share?
- **What can you do** if someone else shares pictures of you or a person you do not know contacts you on social media?
- **What kind of media content** is suitable for children? What kind of content is not suitable for children?
- **How can you make sure** that the small children in your family will not see content destined for older ones?
- **Who is the safe adult** for your child with whom they can discuss their worries?
- **Has a stranger contacted** your child? What should you do in such a situation?
- **Has your child experienced bullying** or harassment on the Internet or in games?
- **What is the best way** of preventing bullying online and what can you do if you are bullied?
- **How do you take a screenshot?**
- **Where can you get help** or advice in different situations?

Info box:

- A private profile is often a safer option than a public one when it comes to protecting against, for example, nasty comments, sexual harassment and grooming and other risks. [Find out more about the security of digital environments here.](#)
- [Find out more about online crimes here.](#)
- It is best to always ask for permission to share photos and videos. Please note that it can also be illegal.
- A child is entitled to privacy. To ensure the best interests and safety of the child, the parents may find out what and with whom the child has been communicating with or where the child is. In such cases, the parents are allowed to check the data even if they were otherwise private. The parents cannot act only out of curiosity, though.



4. Lead by example and guide children and young people to good behaviour online



- 1 Be a safe adult** with whom your child can talk about both nice things and their concerns.
- 2 Identify** how you use digital devices and whether your daily life is balanced and promotes well-being – your example affects your child’s skills to regulate their use of digital devices.
- 3 Leave the digital devices** out of your family moments and be actively present in your child’s daily life person to person.
- 4 You should also consider** what you post and tell online. Ask permission if you share photos or stories about your child in your social media updates.
- 5 Compliment your child** whenever they work properly with digital media.
- 6 Remember to observe** proper netiquette yourself respecting others. How you act and talk about others affects your child’s way of dealing with others.
- 7 Be prepared to learn** and stay curious about the phenomena and trends of digital media so you can discuss them with your child.

Checklist of things to discuss with your child:

- **What does your child think** about your way of using digital devices and media?
- **Do you follow the digital rules** you have agreed upon in your family? Why?
- **What kind of model** are you for your child relating to online behaviour?
- **Do you ask your child** for permission for online updates or photos that they feature in?



5. Network with other parents



- 1 Children are safer** when their parents know each other and keep in touch with each other.
- 2 By keeping in touch** with other parents, they will remain aware of the phenomena in digital media and are able to tackle harmful or challenging situations when necessary.
- 3 In the parents' networks**, they can agree on more detailed rules based on the recommendations for digital daily life in order to safeguard the children's well-being.
- 4 The parents can communicate** using e.g., instant messaging services.
- 5 It is important that different services**, such as daycare centres, schools and hobby groups, create opportunities for parents to network. This also creates opportunities for dialogue between parents and the services.

Checklist of things to discuss with your child:

- **What best practices** have other families introduced?
- **What challenges** have they encountered and how have they resolved them?
- **What would be a suitable channel** of communication for parents?
- **What kinds of things** should the parents agree on with each other?
- **How do daycare centres, schools and hobby groups** deal with digital themes and how could they involve the parents?



6. Information worth exploring for adults



- City of Oulu: [Safety Skills Education](#)
- City of Oulu: [Material for Parents](#)
- City of Oulu: [Electronic Family Centre \(in Finnish\)](#)
- Finnish Society on Media Education: [A guide to a balanced digital daily life \(in Finnish\)](#)
- Finnish Society on Media Education: [Youth on media, a guide for adults \(in Finnish\)](#)
- Save the Children: [Kidital – Support your children in their digital daily lives \(in Finnish\)](#)

Where can you get help and support?

- Police: poliisi.fi
- Victim Support Finland: [Children and young people as victims of crime](#)
- Mannerheim League for Child Welfare: [Helpline for Parents](#)
- Save the Children: [Netari service](#)
- Save the Children: [Nettivihje Hotline](#)