

Helping Children Manage Device Distractions

A child who keeps checking a phone, game, message, or video during schoolwork may not need another lecture about self-control. Digital devices are built to compete for attention, and the environment can make concentration either easier or harder. Start by changing the setup before expecting the child to resist every interruption. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends family media rules such as one screen at a time, turning off notifications and autoplay, and creating screen-free times and places.¹ For homework, that can mean placing the phone outside arm's reach, closing entertainment tabs, and using do-not-disturb or focus mode. AAP guidance for young teens specifically recommends using focus or do-not-disturb settings during school, homework, and bedtime so the child has more control over when the device demands attention.² Involve the child in selecting the settings. Ask, "Which alerts actually need to reach you during homework?" and let the child turn off the rest. Recent AAP policy also recommends screen-free homework when possible and emphasizes one-screen-at-a-time use.³ If a device is required for the assignment, create planned check times rather than allowing constant checking. For example, complete one section, stand up for a short break, then check messages before the next focus block. Do not make the parent the permanent notification police. Model the setup, practice it together, and then transfer responsibility: the child starts the focus mode, places the phone, and records whether the plan worked. Praise the self-management behavior: "You noticed the notification was pulling you away and changed the setting." If device use repeatedly interferes with sleep, schoolwork, relationships, or the ability to stop, bring the pattern to the child's pediatrician or school support team.

Did You Know?

- ✓ AAP Family Media Plan guidance recommends one screen at a time and turning off notifications and autoplay to reduce unnecessary engagement.¹
- ✓ AAP guidance for young teens recommends focus or do-not-disturb modes during school, homework, and bedtime.²
- ✓ AAP's 2025 digital-media policy recommends protecting homework time and creating screen-free periods when possible.³

Research Sources

1. American Academy of Pediatrics, [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org/healthychildren/1-to-2-year-olds/healthy-choices-to-know/Pages/How-to-Make-a-Family-Media-Plan.aspx). "How to Make a Family Media Plan."
2. American Academy of Pediatrics, [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org/healthychildren/13-to-18-years/Kids-&-Screen-Time/The-5-C's-Questions-for-Young-Teens.aspx). "Kids & Screen Time: The 5 C's Questions for Young Teens."
3. American Academy of Pediatrics. "Digital Ecosystems, Children, and Adolescents: Policy Statement." 2025.

Ten-Minute Distraction-Proof Device Setup

Use this page to change the environment before the work begins, then let your child practice managing the device independently.

Child's name: _____ Date: _____

Task: _____ Device required: _____

1. Name the Biggest Distraction - About 2 Minutes

Identify the alert, app, site, or device most likely to interrupt the task.

Biggest distraction: _____

2. Change One Setting - About 2 Minutes

Turn off, mute, close, or block one unnecessary source of interruption.

Setting changed: _____

3. Choose the Device Location - About 1 Minute

Place nonessential devices where they will not be automatically checked.

Device location during work: _____

4. Set a Focus Block - About 3 Minutes

Choose when the child will work and when a planned check or break will happen.

Work for: _____ minutes Planned check/break: _____

5. Let the Child Run the System - About 2 Minutes

Have the child start the setting and evaluate whether it worked.

☐ I stayed focused ☐ I need to adjust: _____

What Parents Can Say: "You changed the setup instead of depending on willpower alone."