

Rebuilding focus in the digital and AI age

Why sustained attention matters for learning

Tips for parents



Did you know?

AI use can impact attention span. As AI technology continues to shift and appear in new products, today, AI use and screen time go hand in hand. Research suggests that higher screen use is associated with greater difficulty maintaining focus and concentration.¹

Learning requires sustained focus and attention. Students develop stronger reasoning, creativity, and critical thinking when they stay focused on challenging material over time. When screens distract, learning suffers.

Experts recommend limits on screen time for kids.² While there are no specific screen time or AI time limit recommendations for adolescents, screen time should be limited if it harms kids' sleep habits, reduces their time for physical activity or hobbies, or negatively impacts their mental health.

The quality of screen time matters, too.

Interactive, educational, age-appropriate screen time is better than mindless staring and swiping.

Focus can be rebuilt. Limiting screen time, engaging in physical activity or mindfulness,³ and participating in interactive learning experiences⁴ can strengthen kids' ability to concentrate on meaningful work that helps them learn and grow.

¹ Associations between screen use, learning and concentration among children and young people in western countries: A scoping review, by Calina Leonhardt, Dina Danielsen, and Susan Anderson, 2025.

² The mediatrix's guide: a joyful approach to raising healthy, smart, kind kids in a screen-saturated world by Michael Rich and Teresa H. Barker, 2024.

³ Popular interventions to enhance sustained attention in children and adolescents: A critical systematic review, by Eadaoin J. Slattery et al., 2022.

⁴ Engaging young minds: Rating strategies and environmental factors to enhance attention span for primary pupils, by Nova A. Corciega et al., 2025.



What to notice

How much time your kids spend on screens. Between phones, tablets, computers, and TVs, screen time can quickly add up. Pay attention to the hours spent on screens and AI tools each day. Notice whether your kid has regular time away from screens to think deeply, solve problems, and simply daydream.

How your kid handles long-form reading. Many things affect attention, but if your kids become restless during longer reading assignments or immediately turn to AI for a summary, it may be time to start practicing activities that rebuild focus.

What you can do: Conversations to rebuild focus

With your kids:

We recommend these activities for kids ages 10-14. But you know your kid best! If these are relevant to you, use them!

- **Conversation starter:** Why do you think screens, AI, and digital tools capture your attention? How do you feel when you've spent a few hours on a screen?
- **Rebuild focus.** If your kids can't focus long enough to read a chapter in a book, complete a math worksheet, or write a paragraph (without help from AI), make a plan to rebuild their focus. This could be daily mindfulness activities, engaging in a 10-minute physical exercise when they feel their focus dropping, or starting with 10 minutes of uninterrupted reading and slowly increasing that time over weeks or months.
- **Quiz your kid.** Ask your kids to choose which student they think learns the most:
 - a) A student who does homework with their phone next to them
 - b) A student who does homework with their phone in the same room, but out of reach and sight
 - c) A student who does homework with their phone in another room

The answer is c! Early research findings show that students who keep their phones farther away from them while doing schoolwork perform better.⁵

- **Analyze if you're choosing time or killing time.**⁶ With your kids, explore the feature on your smartphones that allows you to see how much time you are spending on each app (sometimes called "Screen Time" or "Digital Wellbeing"—look in your phone's settings). Together, write down how many hours you spent on each app in the past two days, what you did on it, and what you got out of it. If your kids (or you) can't remember what you did, you are probably killing time, rather than choosing it.

In your school or community:

- Ask your kids' school how much time students spend in front of screens each day, including computers, tablets, and phones.

⁵ According to Angela Duckworth, sharing early findings from the Phones in Focus initiative.

⁶ The Disengaged Teen, by Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop, 2025



Find more in our Parent Tip Sheet Library! For more detailed information, including data sources, check out the full report: A new direction for students in an AI world: Prosper, Prepare, Protect.