



Autism Spectrum Disorder Parenting Guidelines

Raising children in the age of screens and smartphones can be overwhelming for all kinds of parents, and even more so for families whose children are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). FOSI's [7 Steps to Good Digital Parenting](#) provide a universal starting point for navigating tech use in your home. These five guidelines build on those steps with additional support for parents raising kids with ASD.

1. Customize your approach.

Just as ASD spans a wide range of conditions, there's no one size fits all when it comes to parenting on the spectrum.

- Set family goals based on your child's unique needs.
- Crowdsource ideas from the ASD community.
- Adjust advice for your specific situation.
- Incorporate technology – where it makes sense for your child – to support family goals.

2. Use screens in smaller doses.

Screen time is a stimulant to all children, but the ASD brain is more sensitive to stimulants.

- Try a 3-week digital fast to determine how sensitive your child is to screen time. Note changes in attention, focus, self regulation, eye contact, and communication.
- Not all screen use is created equal. Apps that encourage social interaction such as Facetime so a child can communicate with family members far away is not the same as a gaming app. Limit daily gaming and non-educational screen time to 30 minutes to 2 hours, based on the time of week and your child's age and capacity to manage stimulation.
- Treat screen time as a privilege, not a right, that must be earned through good behavior and cooperation.
- Turn off all screens 90 minutes before sleep. Avoid using screens in the bedroom.

3. Put 'education' in educational apps.

Screen time can be beneficial and understanding which apps, games and websites are best for your child are crucial for enhanced learning. Determine which learning apps provide educational value by evaluating the following features:

- Do they encourage kids to take a time-out from app play?
- Is the app engaging, but not distracting?
- Does the app encourage real-life interactions?
- What do you expect your child to learn?

Review time spent with traditional devices like tablets, computers, phones, and also connected toys and digital assistants. Understand how your child is interacting with each of these devices and identify educational opportunities with each. Limit non-educational screen time to allow for productive time with quality digital media.

4. Meet them where they are.

Not all screen time and content are equal. With children on the spectrum, it's extra important to understand not just what they're fixated on, but why they find it especially compelling.

- Explore your child's online interests together. Join in, ask questions, and share their excitement.
- Look for patterns in how they react to different types of content.
- Channel online interests into productive offline activity. Encourage them to explore similar topics and build related skills.

5. Support family contracts with tech solutions.

Naturally "unplugging" can be harder for children with ASD, so use technology to help make transitions smoother.

- Establish a consistent routine. Consider parental controls that schedule device time to aid in transitions and teach self-regulation skills.
- Track time and usage. Use monitoring tools to better understand your child's online activity.
- Filter out overstimulating and confusing topics like porn, suicide or violent games.