

# Bring digital literacy education into your classroom.



## Lesson plan: Digital wellness & responsible usage

Created in partnership  
with MediaSmarts.



**Digital wellness:** rules to live by

**Grades:** 4-6

**Duration:** 45 minutes

### Overview

First, students will begin by identifying the positive and negative aspects of screens and other digital technology. Then, as a class come up with smart ways to handle the negatives, and discuss how rules can help us to manage our screen time better. Next, as a group, discuss what rules are fair and helpful for everyone, and ask students to consider some rules or guidelines they wish adults in their lives would follow, too. Finally, work together to create a list of rules to help manage screens and tech that will apply to your classroom. The goal is to make the digital world fun and balanced together.

### Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Identify the positive and negative aspects of media and technology
- Consider how external and self-imposed rules can help manage these negative aspects
- Consider what makes a rule necessary, effective and fair
- Reflect on the role of technology in their and their families' lives

### Preparation and materials

Before beginning the lesson, make sure you have access to a blackboard, digital whiteboard, chart paper or a digital projector and computer.

**Note:** If completing the optional activity, make sure you have craft supplies available for students.

## Procedure

Start by asking students how many think that there are positive things about screen devices (smartphones, computers, tablets, etc.) or other digital technology.

(Nearly all hands will go up.) What are some of the positive things about screen devices?

Write the heading “Positive Things About Screens” on the board and record students’ responses. (Likely answers include: entertainment, creativity, socializing. There’s no need to develop an exhaustive list – just get enough responses to confirm that there are positive things about screens and tech.)

**Now ask:** How many think there can be negative things about screens and tech?  
What are some of them?

Write the heading “Negative Things About Screens” on the board and record students’ responses. (Students may need a bit more prompting here, but will likely have some suggestions. Again, there’s no need to develop an exhaustive list, though you should make sure the issue of overuse or distraction is raised.)

Once students have listed some negative aspects or effects of screens, ask them:  
What are some ways of helping us get the positives of screens with as few of the negatives as possible? (There’s no need to record the answers to this one.)

If no student suggests it, point out that one way of doing this is with rules. Sometimes we make rules for ourselves, sometimes other people make us follow rules, and sometimes we get to be part of deciding what the rules are. (You may mention here that being involved in deciding the rules is part of being in a democracy.)

**Now ask:** How many students have rules they set for themselves about using tech or screens? (Few students will likely raise their hands, but either way you can tell them that more than half of teens have set rules for themselves about how much time they spend on their phones or playing video games.)

**Then ask:** How many have rules at home about using screens or tech?

Ask those who raised their hand to give examples of rules at their homes about screens or tech. In the discussion, make sure the following themes come up:

- How much time you spend with screens/tech
- Times and places you don’t use screens/tech, e.g. after bedtime or at the dinner table
- What you have to get done before using screens/tech, e.g. homework
- How you’re expected to behave when using tech
- What you’re allowed to watch or play
- Things you need parental permission or supervision to do

**Ask students:** Do you think these rules are fair and effective? Why or why not? (Let students discuss this for a few minutes to try to bring out what makes them see a rule as fair and effective.)

Divide the board or a piece of paper into two vertical columns. On the left column, record rules for screen/tech use that the majority of students can agree are necessary, effective and fair. (Don't tell them what the right-hand column is for yet.)

**Now ask:** Are screens or tech sometimes bad for adults in your lives (parents, teachers, caregivers, etc.)? What are some of the negative effects? (If students need prompting, you can tell them that more than half of teens say their parents are sometimes or often distracted when talking to them because of their phones.)

Now write "Rules for Kids" at the top of the left-hand column and "Rules for Adults" at the top of the right-hand column.

**Ask:** What rules do you think adults should have to follow relating to tech/screens? Tell students to apply the same test as before: the rules they list should be necessary, effective and fair.

Go through the lists and select rules (for both kids and adults) that are relevant to the classroom and school in general (including times like lunch and recess).

Have students create a poster or other media work that shows the tech and screen rules that everyone in the class agrees to.

## Optional

Have students create cards for their parents, grandparents or other caregivers:

- One side will have the heading "I promise to...", followed by the rules for kids they've agreed are necessary, effective and fair.
- The other side will have the heading "I'll help you to...", followed by the rules for adults identified by the class.

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