



## **It's Back to School – Time to Refocus!**

*“How to help your Teen Unplug and Focus during the School Year”?*

**By Joan A. John-Cumbermack** (updated on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2025)

Are you tired of asking your teenager to put down their phone? You're not alone! With school starting again, balancing screen time and schoolwork becomes even more important. Here's how to help your 13+ year-old unplug and stay on top of their studies, without the constant battle over screens.

### **Why Screen Time Becomes a Bigger Deal During School**

Let's be real, screens are everywhere, and for teens, they're not just a source of entertainment; they're a lifeline to friends, school, and the latest trends. As the new school year begins, the challenges around screen time can really ramp up. With homework, online classes, extra-curricular activities, and social media all competing for your teen's attention, it's easy for them to get overwhelmed—and for their grades to suffer.

A study by the American Academy of Paediatrics found that the average teen spends around 7 hours a day on screens outside of schoolwork. Yikes! Excessive screen time can lead to difficulties in concentrating, sleep problems, lower academic performance, negative social impacts, and much more. So, how can you help your 13+ year-old strike the right balance and make sure they're set up for success this school year? Here are some strategies that might work for you.

#### **1. Set School-Friendly Screen Rules (Without Starting World War III)**

*New School Year = New Rules.* Setting limits on screen time can feel like a battle, but it doesn't have to be. The key is to involve your teen in the process, so they feel like they have

some control over the situation. Creating some structure around screen time can help your teen focus better and avoid falling behind on their schoolwork.



*"Creating a structure that prioritizes schoolwork helps teens develop good habits that last beyond the school year," says Dr. Sarah Johnson, a child psychologist.*

### ***Ideas:***

***Homework First:*** Set a rule that all homework and study time should come before any recreational screen use. This way, they'll get their schoolwork out of the way and won't be up late trying to finish it.

***Tech-Free Study Zones:*** Designate a specific area in your home where studying should take place—no phones allowed. This can help minimize distractions and improve focus.

***Introduce Screen Curfews:*** Children should not use screens after a specific time in the evening. This helps them wind down before bedtime, which can lead to better sleep for everyone!

***Scheduled Screen Breaks:*** Schedule short breaks during which your teen can check their devices (for instance, checking emails and text messages) between study sessions.

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## 2. Build a Balanced School-Day Routine

A good routine can make all the difference during the school year. By helping your teen organize their time, you can ensure they're getting their schoolwork done and still have time to relax.

*"A consistent routine not only helps with school performance but also reduces stress and anxiety," says John Lee, an education consultant.*



### Try This:

**Daily Planners:** Encourage your teen to use a planner or an app to keep track of assignments, tests, and other responsibilities. This helps them manage their time better and avoid last-minute cramming.

**Visual Schedules:** Display a daily schedule that everyone can see. This helps set clear expectations for when screen time is okay and when it's time for other activities.

**Flexible Routine:** While it's good to have a schedule, don't stress if things don't always go as planned. Life happens!

**Consistency Is Key:** Try to keep a consistent daily routine, even on weekends. This helps reinforce good habits and makes transitions between school and home life smoother.

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### 3. Encourage Healthy, Screen-Free Breaks

When your teen takes a break, it's tempting for them to dive straight into social media or gaming. However, encouraging screen-free activities can help them recharge better and avoid burnout. Sometimes it's all about showing your teen that there's more to life than what's on their screen.



*"Breaks that involve physical or creative activities can refresh a teen's mind, making them more productive when they return to their schoolwork," says Emma Rodriguez, a youth development specialist.*

#### Suggestions:

**Physical Activity:** Encourage your teen to get outside, whether it's for an activity or just some time in the fresh air. Exercise can boost their mood and energy levels, making it easier to focus when they get back to studying. Suggest activities such as hiking, biking, or simply walking the dog. A bit of fresh air and sun can do wonders!

**Creative Outlets:** Hobbies such as drawing, writing, or playing an instrument can be great ways to unwind without relying on a screen. These activities also stimulate their mind in different ways, which can be a nice break from academics.

**Family Time:** Use breaks as an opportunity to connect as a family—whether it's cooking together, playing a board game, or just chatting. It's a great way to de-stress and stay connected.

**Social Time:** Encourage face-to-face hangouts with friends—like going to the park or playing a sport together.

## References:

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## 4. Lead by Example—Especially During the School Year

Kids learn a lot by watching their parents. If you're glued to your own screen, it's hard to convince your teen to put theirs down. Show them how it's done! Model what it means to practice good screen habits, and your teen is more likely to follow suit.



*"When parents model good screen habits, it reinforces the importance of balance and focus during the school year,"*

*"Teens are more likely to follow your lead than your words alone," explains Dr. Michael Thompson, a family therapist.*

### *Tips:*

**Work Together:** If you're working from home or have other responsibilities, set up a time where both of you can focus on work without distractions. Also, find activities that you can do as a family that don't involve screens—such as cooking, playing games, or simply chatting. This shows that screen time isn't the only way to spend time.

**Family Study Sessions:** Occasionally, sit down with your teen during their study time—read a book, catch up on your own work, or even just be present. This creates a supportive environment that values focus and discipline.

**Be Mindful of Your Own Use:** Try to limit your screen time, especially when you're around your teen. Be the example of the behavior you wish for them to follow.

**Talk About It:** Talk openly about why taking breaks from screens is important, especially during the school year. Be sure to share your thoughts on why you're trying to limit their screen time. Sharing your own experiences and strategies may be helpful to them.

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## 5. Use Technology Wisely During School Time

If you can't beat them, join them! Technology can be a helpful tool if used correctly—especially when it comes to managing screen time and keeping up with schoolwork.



*"Technology can be an ally in helping teens stay focused and on track during the school year," says Lisa Kim, a digital wellness advocate.*

## ***Tools You Can Use:***

**Parental Controls:** Utilize apps or built-in device settings to limit recreational screen time, monitor usage, and block specific apps during designated school hours and homework periods. This can help keep distractions at bay.

**Educational & Study Apps:** Encourage the use of apps that can help with homework, promote learning and creativity, and test prep, rather than just social or entertainment apps.

**Focus Tools:** Explore apps designed to minimize distractions, such as those that block social media during study sessions or encourage timed work sessions.

**Built-In Features:** Most devices have settings that allow you to track and limit screen time. Make use of them!

## **References:**

- Digital Wellness Collective. (2020). *Best Tools for Healthy Tech Use*. Retrieved from <https://www.digitalwellnesscollective.com/resources>
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## **Wrapping It Up!**

As the school year kicks into gear, helping your teen manage their screen time becomes even more crucial. It doesn't have to be a constant struggle. With a little creativity, some clear rules, and a lot of patience, you can help them find a healthier balance.

Remember, it's about balance (for them and you). The goal isn't to ban screens completely—it's about making sure they're just one part of a well-rounded life.

***Are you already trying some of these?  
Got any back-to-school tips or experiences?  
Comment and share them – we're all in this together!***



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## **About Me:**

**Joan A. John-Cumbermack** is a Certified Breakthrough Coach who turns potential into progress. She helps people shatter limits, embrace change, and create the life they've been reaching for. Backed by years in coaching and human resource development, Joan brings sharp insights, proven tools, and a belief that *"As long as you have life, you have an opportunity to make a difference."*