Tech-Smart Skills

Modern life is filled with technology. Devices and apps help us in many ways, but they can also get in the way at times. Reaching our goals requires us to become tech-smart.

First: What strategies have you already used to try to keep your use of smartphones or other technology from taking up too much of your time?

Second: What are the reasons you most often turn to your technology?

- Entertainment
- Boredom
- Relaxing if worried or tense
- Avoiding unpleasant feelings
- Avoiding unpleasant tasks
- Connecting with friends or family
- Learn new things
- Avoiding awkward situations
- Challenge or excitement
- Other:

Third: Let’s consider why it is so hard to put down our technology in the first place. Companies that make apps, games or devices make more money if we spend more time using their products. Because of this they have developed powerful ways to manipulate us into over-using their products. Put a check mark by any of the sneaky tricks you have noticed:

- Rewards for using it every day, or spending more time
- Penalties for spending less time
- Eye-catching colors or graphics
- Notifications that seem more important than they really are, or make you worry you are missing out
- Using streaks, social pressure or guilt to make you feel like you have to do certain things
- Pictures or videos that draw you in
- The next game or video starts automatically
- Loot boxes or jackpots can show up if you stay on longer
- Victories or rewards or interesting posts show up right when you would usually sign off
- Trying to get you to buy things
- Other:

Considering all of this, what do you want to do differently (if anything) to make sure tech helps you, and doesn’t take over your life?

(If you’re interested, some ideas are listed on the next page.)
Here are just a few clever ideas other teens have tried. You might have even better ones.

- Set screen-free times, activities, or spaces in your life (ex: dinner table, sports practice, in class, homework)
- Turn off notifications
- Tell friends your plan to sign off or use tech differently
- Find ways to stay entertained, connected, or relaxed that aren’t on your phone
- Stick to a device curfew at night (so you have time to unwind and sleep)
- Set time limits for certain tech activities (using a timer or Screentime limits or some other way).
- Switch your phone to grayscale so it is less appealing
- Solve the problems you’re using games or technology to avoid
- Filling up your free time in other ways
- Delete or block certain apps or websites you don’t think add value to your life
- Get a parent/caregiver to agree to rewards if you can meet weekly goals for less time on devices
- Put your smartphone away until after homework is done
- Keep your smartphone in a different room when you don’t want to get sucked in.
- Listen to music through something other than your smartphone so you don’t have to be tempted whenever you change songs
- Address mental health issues (like depression or anxiety) that fuel unhealthy tech habits
- Other:

Jot down any ideas you’d like to try out this week. Try to make your ideas “SMART,” meaning each idea should be Specific, Measurable, Appealing, Realistic, and Time-limited.

What obstacles or situations could screw up your plan? How can you overcome them? (List as many obstacles as you can think of, so you can make your plan super solid.)

Then, follow up!!
Set a phone reminder to follow up next week to see what were the gaps in your plan, and then change up your plan as needed! Staying in charge of technology (not letting it control you) is a lifelong effort.