Screen time is not forever.

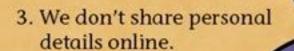Screens are for a
little downtime,
a not-too-long time.

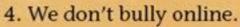Six screen-time safety rules:

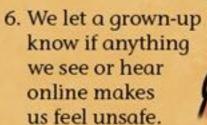1. We only chat or play games online with people we know in real life.

2. We only share texts and photos online with people we know in real life.

3. We don't share personal details online.

4. We don't bully online.

5. We are kind to others online.

6. We let a grown-up know if anything we see or hear online makes us feel unsafe.

So Cute.

# Tips and Activities for Caregivers and Parents

We all rely on screens for connection. Technology is a part of daily life and family life.

The goal of this book is *not* to make you feel worried or guilty about screen use. *Screen Time Is Not Forever* is a teaching tool and a discussion starter for changes you may wish to make at home. When helping kids learn about screen time, we can't simply say, "Turn it off," and then be done. Instead, we can offer a positive spin, one that includes the whole family. As this book says, "Screen time is one little part of your life " and "Screen time is not forever. Let's spend more time TOGETHER."

## The Thinking Behind Setting Screen-Time Limits

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) use science and research to better understand how screen time may affect children's physical and mental health. Those organizations encourage these guidelines for children's screen time:

• For children ages 2–5 years, limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality programs. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.

• For children ages 6 and older, place consistent limits on the time spent using media, and the types of media, and make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity, and other behaviors essential to health.

• Doctors believe that children who have more than the recommended screen time don't get the amount of physical exercise, outdoor play, face-to-face social time, and sleep they truly need. Putting some limits in place is a way to focus on good health.

## Deciding What Works for Your Family

In a perfect world, we could make sure our children follow the recommended screen-time limits each day. But the world is far from perfect—and technology continues to transform aspects of daily life faster than we may anticipate. Guidelines aren't written in stone. After all, what if the way your young child stays in touch with grandparents is through screen time and you prefer not to put too many restrictions on these valuable moments? What if your child is ill and spends a sick day watching videos? What if a pandemic keeps us all indoors, and we rely on screens for education and connection? Do the guidelines have any meaning then? These are all good questions! Think of the guidelines as a reference point. From there, you decide what works day to day, week to week, and year to year.

> See what you find useful here, and then create an approach that works for your individual household. Over time, you can adapt your plan as needed.

**Put real-life experiences first.** You want the best for your child, and that may include the best technology. But know that young children in particular rarely get a brain boost from technology. Real-life activities are better than apps and gadgets. Plan a daily routine that prioritizes exercise, outdoor time, play dates, unstructured play, and face-to-face interaction whenever possible. As noted in the guidelines at left, children ages two to five need a more limited amount of screen time than those over age six. Those restrictions won't be feasible every single day—but it's a goal.

**Think "quality over quantity."** On days when it isn't possible to stick with the screen-time guidelines, focus on managing the quality of the tech and media your child consumes. For example, look for high-quality, educational content. Seek recommendations from sources such as Common Sense Media, where you'll find age-based suggestions for TV, apps, games, and movies. And if your child is using social media platforms to keep in touch with loved ones, don't worry too much if it takes more than an hour to stay connected. To enhance the quality of your child's screen time, join in yourself. Find ways to point out information, ask questions, and make the experience more social.

**Think "safety."** Keep a close eye on the kinds of media your child is exposed to at home (and while at friends' and relatives' homes, if possible). Research continues to show that children should not be exposed to violent media, sexual content, or video games that focus on shooting guns. You may want to be cautious about the news you watch while children are in the room too.