Screen time and ADHD: New guidance for families

Why Parents of Kids With ADHD Deserve More Support Navigating Screen Time is the first comprehensive screen time guidance written for parents of elementary-age kids with ADHD.

Developed by Understood.org in partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the paper pairs the latest research with findings from Understood's 2026 *Screen Time and ADHD: National Parent Survey*.



A critical time for parents of kids with ADHD

Differences in attention, reward processing, and shifting between activities can make it harder for kids with ADHD to step away from screens. In fact, their parents are **nearly three times as likely** as other parents to say their child has trouble stopping screen use almost every time.

Overall, **parents of kids with ADHD feel less confident, more judged, more frustrated, and more like they're failing** when it comes to managing screen time.[1]

Screens don't cause ADHD

More than a third of parents falsely believe screen time can cause ADHD. Research shows that ADHD is largely genetic. But screens and ADHD do *affect* each other, and screen habits can make attention, mood, and sleep harder.

It's not just about time spent on screens

Nearly half of parents say the number of minutes matters more than what kids are doing on screens. **This is called the "myth of minutes."** Limits can help. But what kids are doing, and what screens replace — like sleep and family time — actually matter more than the clock.

[1] Compared with other parents, parents of kids with ADHD are less likely to feel confident managing their child's screen time (43% vs. 65%); more judged (30% vs. 18%); more frustrated (47% vs. 30%); and more like they're failing: (31% vs. 21%).

Parents feel shame around managing screen time, but technology companies play a big role

More than 4 in 5 parents of kids with ADHD say their child's apps include features like autoplay and infinite scroll — two features designed to keep kids hooked. And **only 25 percent of parents of kids with ADHD say tech companies are doing enough to support healthy screen use**, compared with 40 percent of other parents.

Guidance that fits how their child is wired

Over half of parents of kids with ADHD say that it's been difficult to find screen time guidance that addresses ADHD. The white paper's PAUSE strategies are practical, research-backed, and ADHD-specific.

PAUSE strategies

P **Plan the boundaries.** Set family screen rules ahead of time, then let built-in device settings do the enforcing.

A **Anticipate the transition.** Use warnings, a visual timer, and a fun next activity so stopping isn't sudden.

U **Understand the function.** Notice why your child reaches for a screen, then add other ways to cope.

S **Set up screen-free zones.** Protect the times that matter most, starting with meals and bedtime.

E **Exemplify healthy habits.** Kids notice what adults do, so small shifts in your own screen habits can help.

To learn more about the PAUSE strategies, and why the ADHD brain has a unique relationship with screens, read Why Parents of Kids With ADHD Deserve More Support Navigating Screen Time.

Survey methodology:

Understood.org's population research team commissioned *Screen Time and ADHD: National Parent Survey*, an online survey of 800 U.S. parents of children ages 5 to 17, fielded by Qualtrics through an opt-in online panel from September 10 to 25, 2026. It included 400 parents of a child diagnosed with or suspected of having ADHD and 400 parents of children without ADHD. Differences reported between the two groups are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, after adjusting for multiple comparisons. Results for all parents are weighted to reflect the share of U.S. parents of children with ADHD; because that share isn't known precisely, we tested a range from 11.4% (the CDC's estimate of diagnosed ADHD) to 30%, and report only results that hold across that range.

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