

Framing conversations about tech use to avoid conflict

The California Partners Project is engaged in a statewide listening tour with California mothers, parents and caregivers to understand how they are navigating the integration of technology and devices into most aspects of their children's lives. A mom in northern California shared that gaming has created a lot of conflict between she and her teenage son. "We get in fights because it is like pulling teeth to pull him away from the TV."

Conversations about tech use fuel family conflict. Many caregivers throughout California mentioned increased family discord due to disagreements about tech use, including gaming, social media, scrolling and time spent online. Mothers shared deep concerns about the inability to monitor and understand the content their children and teens are seeing online. Whether it is violent or sexually explicit, we know that anything and everything is available online.

Carefully framing conversations is critical to supporting open, honest and productive conversations with your children as they grow. Shafia Zaloom, [author](#) and health educator, recommends parents create an environment free of judgement and shame when talking about screen use. Parents can begin conversations with kids early to develop a strong foundation. (See [Family Digital Wellness Guide](#), Digital Wellness Lab)

Tips to reach agreement on games and devices

TIP 1: Be Curious.

Show your child that you are genuinely interested in how they spend their time online and how those activities make them feel; continue to do so across your child's developmental stages. Play games, watch videos and engage online with your child to deepen your understanding of their interest and desire to be online. Educator Shafia Zaloom suggests parents try to understand what it is that your child thinks is helpful or engaging about technology in a non-judgmental way. (See also [Dear Parents](#), Children's Screen Time Action Network)

TIP 2: Emphasize that the digital space is an extension of your personal space.

Shafia Zaloom suggests reminding your child or teen that most of us probably wouldn't open our bedroom window to a stranger. Ask your child to consider how they share their time online with others and who they choose to engage with on the screen.

TIP 3: Try to be in favor of preferred activities instead of against others.

Parents might talk about the importance of sleep, authentic connection with others, positive body image among other priorities and articulate how tech may or may not get in the way of those. Educator Shafia Zaloom notes this approach may be more successful than focusing only on the activities your family is against like excessive gaming, scrolling through social media, or other online activities.

TIP 4: Lead conversations about tech use with non-judgmental questions.

Shift conversations away from starting with "why" questions to using phrases such as how, what, where and I notice. Some examples include "where are there other places in your life that you can connect with friends/family offline?" or "how do you feel after playing video games/posting selfies?"