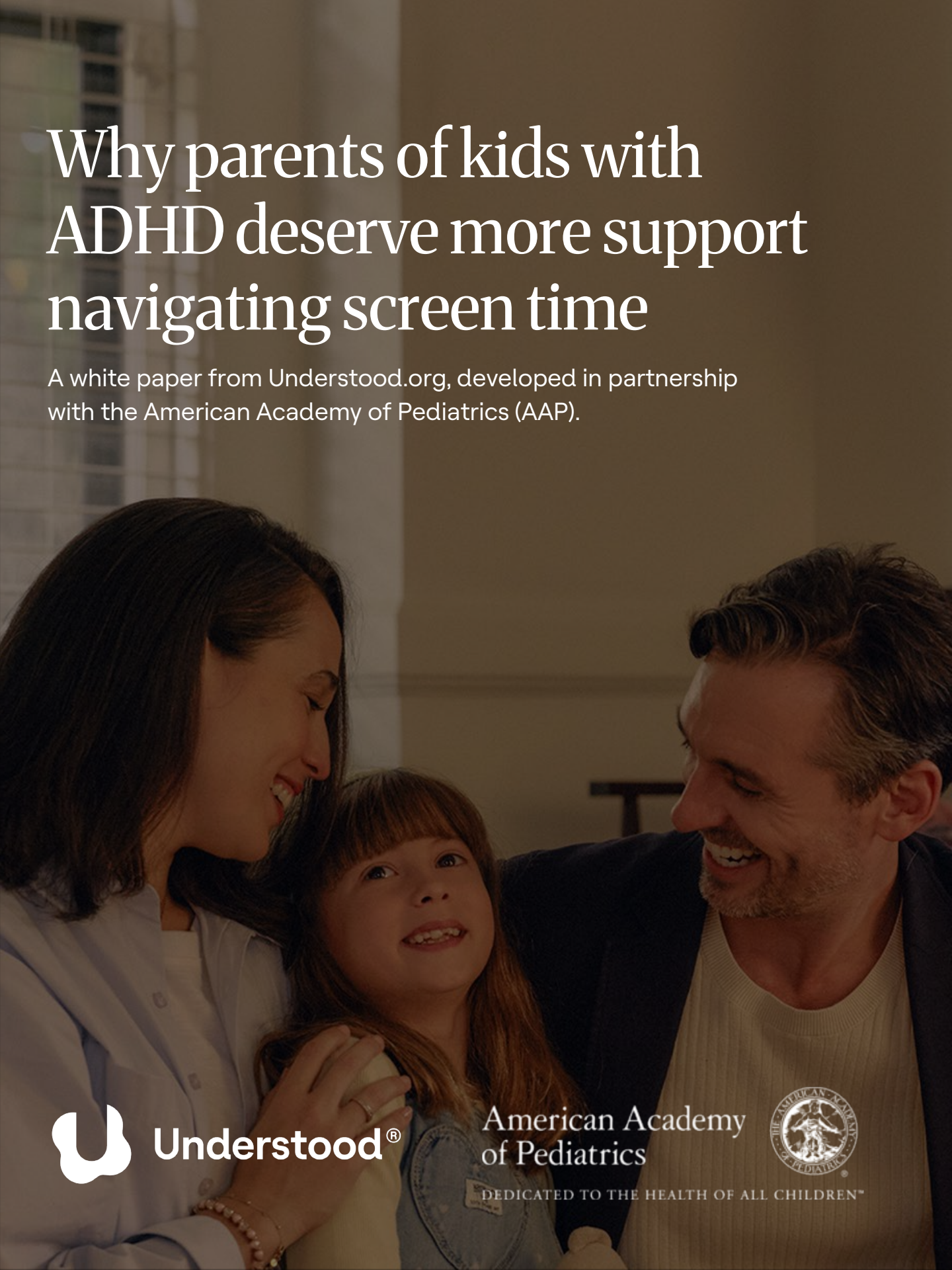
Why parents of kids with ADHD deserve more support navigating screen time

A white paper from Understood.org, developed in partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).



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Screen time guidance can't be "one size fits all"

Navigating screen time is one of the defining parenting challenges of our time. According to Common Sense Media, four in 10 children have their own tablet by age 2, and one in four have a cell phone by age 8. And the idea of "screen time" has changed dramatically. What once meant watching TV in the living room now encompasses an entire digital environment — from a tablet at breakfast to a school-issued laptop.

Screen use is not inherently bad. Screens can support learning, creativity, and connection. For neurodivergent kids, screens can offer assistive technology such as text-to-speech, which reduces obstacles to help kids learn and succeed. But screens can also bring many challenges, from getting in the way of core developmental needs like sleep, movement, play, and real world connection, to surfacing disturbing content.

In a world where screens are part of nearly every moment of a child's day, counting hours tells parents very little. Instead we look at problematic screen time by *how* a child uses screens, not by *how long*. "Problematic" screen time usually means addiction-like use, where a child has a hard time controlling their use and it starts to get in the way of daily life (Holly et al., 2026). Experts have shifted from asking whether screens are harmful to asking how, why, and for whom they cause harm (Wu et al., 2026).

For parents, the more useful question isn't "How long?" but "Is my child's screen use hard to control, and is it crowding out sleep, activity, relationships, or mood?"

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> **"It's probably our number one problem. But it's linked to every other problem too. It's kind of like the root cause of a lot of other problems."**
> —Parent of a 10-year-old child with ADHD
> (Understood.org User Research, 2026)

Answering that question is challenging for nearly every family in this new screen environment, and often even more so for families of children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Screen time challenges are so common because much of what kids encounter on screens is intentionally built to hold their attention for as long as possible. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) 2026 policy statement describes the digital environment as "engagement-based designs that are immersive, pervasive, and commodified" (Munzer et al., 2026, p. 93). When a product is designed to make stopping hard, a child who struggles to stop is simply behaving as the product designers intended.

Children with ADHD often struggle with stopping something interesting, even when it's not on a screen. Stopping an on-screen task that's designed to capture and hold their attention may feel impossible sometimes. **In fact, in Understood.org's 2026 "Screen Time and ADHD: National Parent Survey," parents of kids with ADHD were nearly three times as likely as other parents to say that their child has trouble stopping screen use almost every time.**

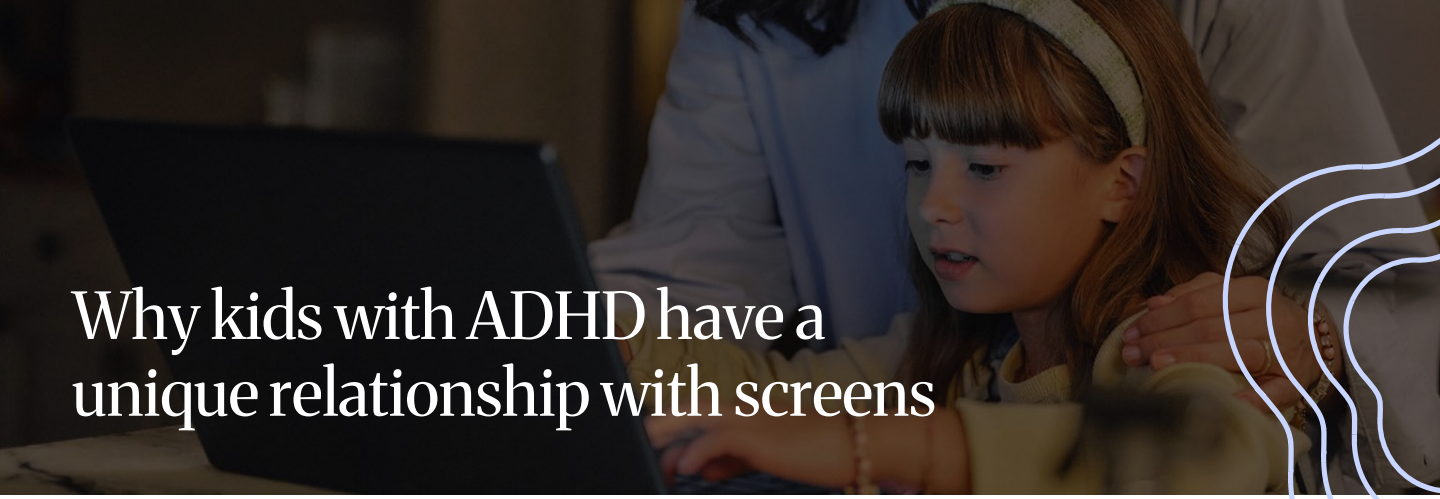
There are real, brain-based reasons that create additional screen time challenges for children with ADHD and their families. There are differences in how ADHD brains handle attention, rewards, and shifting from one activity to the next. This means that the most engaging features of screens are even more rewarding for the ADHD brain. Stopping takes almost superhuman effort.

We know that this ever-changing digital environment can amplify the challenges faced by children with ADHD and their families. That's why "one size fits all" strategies often don't work. Parents of kids with ADHD know this firsthand: **93% said other people misunderstand at least one part of their experience managing screen time with their child. The most common thing they feel others don't understand? That strategies that work for other kids don't always work for theirs (58%; Understood.org, 2026).**

> **"It's very easy to fall into a rhythm where you're like, it has to only be me. I'm the only person going through this right now and everybody else's kids seem so well behaved. It's very easy to get hard on yourself and be like, yeah, I'm the one messing up here."**
>
> —Parent of a 6-year-old child with ADHD (Understood.org User Research, 2026)

We wrote this paper specifically for parents of elementary-age kids with ADHD. These are critical years when screen habits are taking shape, executive function skills are developing, and parents are actively establishing routines and boundaries. This paper will help you understand why screens can be extra challenging for your child. And it will give you practical, tailored strategies to help your family navigate screens with greater confidence and less frustration.

In addition to this paper, we have shorter, quicker resources designed for parents on Understood.org/screen-time.



Why kids with ADHD have a unique relationship with screens

ADHD is a common neurodevelopmental condition that affects focus and behavior, as well as a set of skills known as executive functions, including planning, organization, time management, working memory, and emotional regulation. **More than a third of parents surveyed believe that screen time can cause ADHD (Understood.org, 2026). But the research is clear that it does not. ADHD is largely genetic, with heritability estimated at about 70–80% (Faraone & Larsson, 2019).**

Screens don't cause ADHD, but they can make symptoms worse. The largest study to test the question followed more than 10,000 9- and 10-year-olds for two years. The study found that more screen time was linked to increased ADHD symptoms. But it's important to note that the effects of screen time on ADHD symptoms were small. They also found no evidence that screens can *create* these symptoms (Shou et al., 2025).

Although screen use has not been shown to cause ADHD, screens and ADHD affect each other. A review of 28 studies that followed children over time found the relationship runs both ways: Kids with symptoms associated with ADHD are more likely to slide into problematic screen habits. And problematic screen use can, in turn, make attention and daily life harder, in part by impacting sleep (Thorell et al., 2024). Additionally, kids and adolescents with ADHD have been shown to score higher on measures of problematic digital media use compared with their peers (Werling et al., 2022).

Small changes can make a real difference.

The good news is that parents can take steps to make a measurable difference. A recent study showed that when families cut leisure screen time to three hours a week for just two weeks, children experienced reduced behavioral difficulties compared with families who changed nothing. The greatest benefits children experienced were a reduction in emotional symptoms and improved positive social interactions (Schmidt-Persson et al., 2024).

> **"Fast-paced, high-intensity content, with quick scene changes and bright, saturated colors, can affect how the brain responds. For some kids with ADHD, it's like turning up the volume knob on their symptoms. The good news is that parents have more power than they think to turn it back down."**
> —Libby Matile Milkovich, MD, developmental and behavioral pediatrician at Children's Mercy Kansas City, and a member of the AAP Council on Communications and Media



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Why screen time feels harder to manage when your child has ADHD

Although every child with ADHD is different, there are common themes when it comes to screen time struggles. Kids with ADHD experience differences in the brain's self-management skills, including getting started, holding attention, shifting attention, keeping a goal in mind, managing feelings, and putting on the brakes.

Researchers call these skills executive functions (Lezak, 1982). A useful way to think about them: They're the "manager" part of the brain that plans, keeps track of time, organizes, and has to say "not now" to something fun.

Executive functioning works like the brain's brakes, helping people stop and switch to something else when they need to. But many apps and games are designed to keep those brakes from kicking in. They offer something new every few seconds, surprise users with rewards, encourage streaks, and keep users engaged as long as possible. These features are designed to make "not now" as hard as possible for *everyone*. For a child whose "not now" skills are still developing — and developing on a slower timeline — this setup can lead to additional challenges with transitioning away from screen time.

3 common screen time challenges for kids with ADHD

1 Transitioning off screens

It's 6:52 pm. You've said "two more minutes" three times. Your child hasn't heard any of your reminders. And when you finally take away your child's device, the meltdown is epic. You wonder why this is so hard.

Here's why. What may seem like a simple request is actually a combination of several very challenging tasks. You're asking them to stop doing something rewarding, remember what comes next, tolerate leaving a game unfinished, and shift to something less exciting. Each is a challenging step for any child. But for a child with ADHD they're even harder.

2 Big feelings

Many people with ADHD feel emotions more strongly and take longer to calm down afterward (Paulus et al., 2021). Because of this, staying calm when something is suddenly interrupted may be harder for a child with ADHD than for other kids. To add to the challenge, big feelings can seem like they're going from 0 to 60 in mere seconds.

Because of this, parents may either avoid ending screen time to avoid potential meltdowns, or they use screens as a way to regulate big feelings. Handing a child a device to help them calm or regulate is common, but it tends to help only in the short term. A study showed that frequently using a device to calm a child was associated with emotional reactivity increasing and worsening over time (Radesky et al., 2023).

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3 Sleep struggles

Sleep problems are common for kids with ADHD. In one clinic sample, nearly three in four children with ADHD had a sleep problem, and almost half had a moderate or severe one (Sung et al., 2008). A meta-analysis found that children with ADHD are more likely to resist bedtime, to take longer to fall asleep, to wake at night, to struggle to get up, and to be sleepy during the day (Cortese et al., 2009). A 2025 meta-analysis of 44 studies confirmed shorter, more fragmented sleep (Xian et al., 2025).

Adding screens to this equation can create even more challenges in an already difficult situation. Screen time can push bedtime later, activate the brain, and even prevent a room from being dark enough for sleep. Losing sleep has been shown to worsen attention, memory, self-control, and mood, which can make ADHD symptoms worse. In a study of 374 school-age children, evening and bedroom screen use was linked to more sleep disturbance. And it was linked to more ADHD-related behavior, with sleep accounting for part of the link (Cavalli et al., 2021).

If you're reading this as a parent, you may be wondering exactly how much sleep your kids need. While the amount needed varies from child to child, experts recommend the following hours of sleep per 24-hour period (Paruthi et al., 2016).

Age	Amount of sleep recommended
3–5 years old	10–13 hours (including naps)
6–12 years old	9–12 hours



Hard by design: How technology companies build products to keep kids hooked

The design of many apps and programs creates the screen time struggles that many families experience. The AAP's 2026 policy statement states that digital platforms use business models designed to maximize user engagement (Munzer et al., 2026). That means companies invest large sums of money and time to intentionally design digital products that keep people glued to a screen, and make it very hard to stop.

The AAP argues that digital media companies should face product safety requirements similar to those that apply to food, cars, and medical devices (Munzer et al., 2026). We agree that more regulation is needed. But in the meantime, we want to make parents aware of the very specific features that make it hard for kids to move away from screens.

Even if the content itself seems harmless, having a hard time getting unstuck can get in the way of things kids really need to be spending time on. More than nine in 10 parents say screen time takes away from at least one other part of their child's life, like sleep, family time, or exercise (Understood.org, 2026).

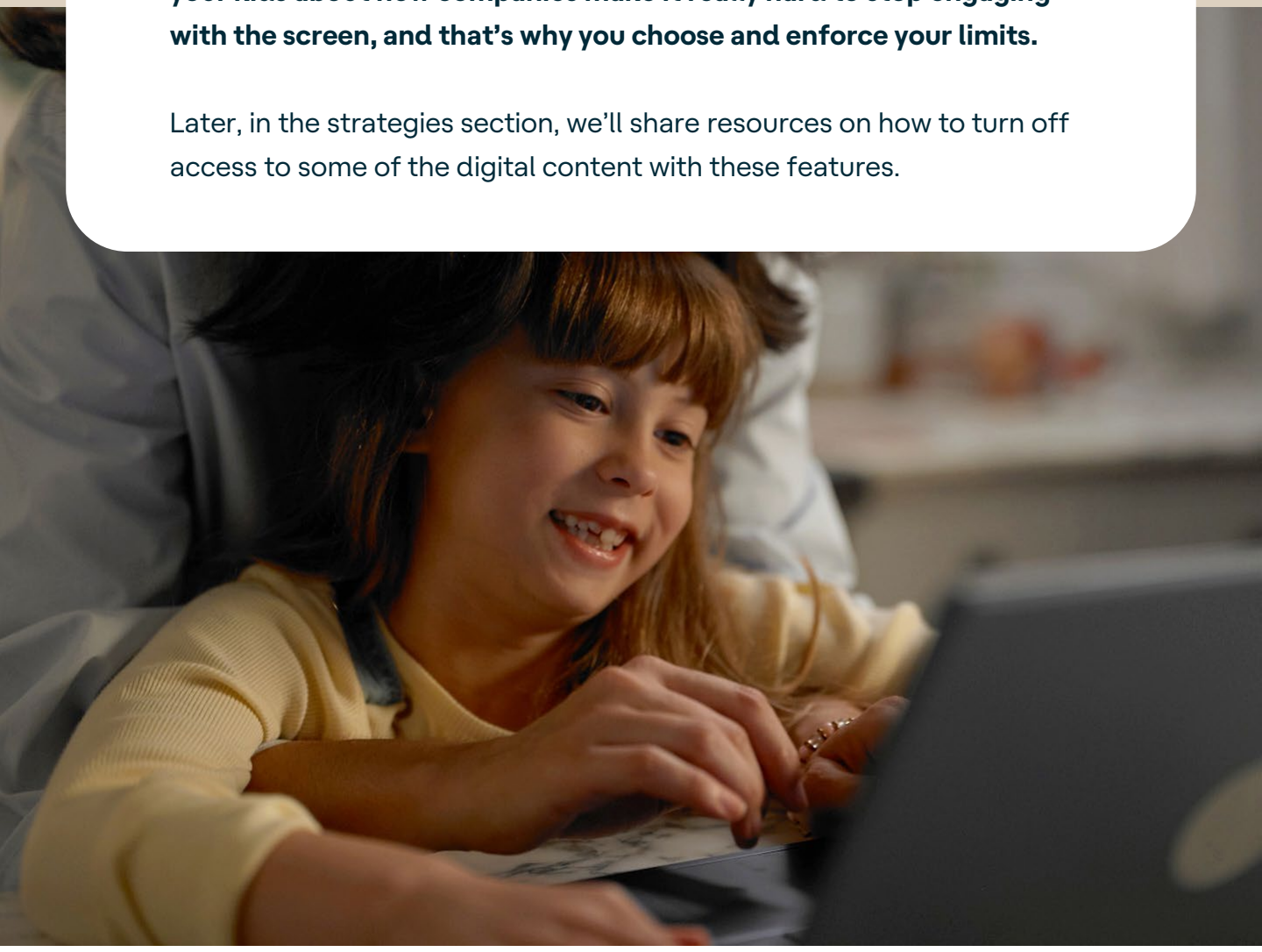
The screen features that “hook” kids

We’re sharing these for two main reasons:

First, we want you to know it’s not your fault or your child’s fault that this is hard. It’s hard for everyone. And it’s hard by design.

Second, knowledge is power. When you become aware of the design features to look out for, you are better equipped to make informed choices about what kinds of screen time to avoid. **You can also talk to your kids about how companies make it really hard to stop engaging with the screen, and that’s why you choose and enforce your limits.**

Later, in the strategies section, we’ll share resources on how to turn off access to some of the digital content with these features.



Screen feature	What it is	How it keeps kids with ADHD hooked
Autoplay	A new video starts as soon as the last one ends.	Many kids with ADHD have trouble moving away from interesting activities. With no natural stopping point, kids can watch video after video without ever having to pause and decide to keep going.
Infinite scroll	New posts, videos, or pictures keep loading as your child scrolls.	Kids can scroll much longer than they meant to without noticing the time, and switching away gets harder. For novelty-seeking brains, the promise of constant newness is a powerful draw.
Short-form video	Very short videos are made to grab attention.	"Just one more" can turn into an hour. Slower activities like reading or homework can feel boring by comparison. One study linked short-form video with more inattention, even after accounting for total screen time (Chiencharoenthanakij et al., 2025).
Intermittent rewards	Rewards like "spin to win" come at unexpected times.	When rewards come at unexpected times, people tend to keep trying again and again. ADHD involves differences in how the brain responds to rewards, so these can be even harder to walk away from.
Notifications, streaks, and badges	The user gets alerts, badges, and rewards for using the app.	These are hard to resist because kids with ADHD can be especially drawn to the instant rewards. Notifications may distract from homework and delay bedtime. A fear of losing a "streak" can cause anxiety, meltdowns, or overuse.
Algorithmic feeds	The app monitors what your child likes, then picks what to show next.	These feeds can be very engaging for kids who have trouble shifting attention away from things they enjoy. The app learns their unique preferences, then hooks them by making the material endlessly interesting.

The myth of minutes: Why what kids do on screens matters more

What you won't find here is a specific limit around the number of minutes a child should spend on screens each day. The AAP's Screen Time Guidelines no longer recommend a single time limit for school-age kids, because the evidence doesn't support one cutoff number for every child. Its 2026 policy statement recommends tailoring screen time to each family's circumstances, including their needs and whether it's a school night or a weekend (Munzer et al., 2026).

A 30-minute video call with a grandparent, a school audiobook, and an endless feed of short-form videos on YouTube are not the same thing — even if they add up to the same number of minutes. **What kids are doing on screens, who they're doing it with, and how they're doing it all make a difference.**

It also matters what the screen time is costing, displacing, or "crowding out." For example, are screens getting in the way of core developmental needs, like sleep, movement, family time, or school? Are they getting in the way of building critical lifelong skills, like learning how to regulate emotions or socialize with others? The questions below can help you look at screen time from different angles, including when, where, and how it's used.

> **"With an iPad, it's so accessible. It's right in front of you. It's so easy for them to spend so much time on it. And then they just don't really know how to function without having a parent guiding them, like, go outside and play basketball. This generation, especially my kids, are really struggling with how to spark that."**
> —Parent of a 9-year-old child with ADHD (Understood.org User Research, 2026)

The AAP's 5 Cs, with an ADHD lens

The AAP's Family Media Plan is a free tool for writing down your family's screen rules together. It's the foundation for much of our guidance, and we recommend it. The AAP's Kids & Screen Time: How to Use the 5 Cs of Media Guidance has a set of questions to help any family think about media. Here they are in the AAP's own words, with what we'd add for a child with ADHD.

The 5 Cs	The AAP asks (in its words)	The ADHD lens
Child	"Who is your child, what is their personality? And how does this influence what media they are attracted to, and how it affects them?"	Think about attention, sensory needs, medication timing, social needs, and how your child handles transitions and their mood and behavior after screens.
Content	"Learn about what your kids play or watch."	**Does this game or show have a natural stopping point?** Find games or shows that have a natural stopping point. Avoid autoplay, endless feeds, and can't-pause games. **Is it high quality?** Kids who act out or experience big feelings benefit more from pro-social media (shows and games that model kindness and managing emotions). They're also more sensitive to violent content. **Is it assistive technology (AT)?** Just like we wouldn't suggest restricting glasses for sight, we wouldn't suggest cutting back on AT. For kids with ADHD and other challenges, tools like audiobooks and speech-to-text help level the playing field.

The 5 Cs	The AAP asks (in its words)	The ADHD lens
Calm	"All kids need to learn strategies for how to manage strong emotions or fall asleep at night, and sometimes media becomes their main go-to strategy."	Screens may be serving to help your child manage emotions or energy. Don't suddenly remove the only tool that works. Instead, add others alongside it to help them build their regulation skills so screens aren't the primary tool.
Crowding out	"Depending on how much media your family is using and what time of day, it might be crowding out other things your family cares about."	For kids with ADHD, protect sleep, movement, meals, family, and social time by creating screen-free zones. **Consider starting with meals.** Mealtime is often the easiest place to begin. **Prioritize sleep.** It can be harder, but it's one of the most important. Keep devices out of bedrooms. Use a regular alarm clock instead of a phone. You can also set your Wi-Fi router to turn off at a certain time each night.
Communication	"Talk about media early and often."	Name that this is hard, even for adults. Say your plan out loud, in the same words, before screens go on. Talk about your family approach to screens in everyday language, just as you talk about brushing teeth or washing hands.

The 5 Cs are a framework for reflection, helping you decide what to look at in your child's screen use. The PAUSE strategies that follow build on them, turning those questions into concrete steps designed for kids with ADHD.

PAUSE: 5 screen time strategies that fit how your child is wired

Before you start

Managing screen time is hard for most parents. Common Sense Media states that screen time tends to be higher in lower-income families. Screens are often the affordable, available option when parents have to work or get things done.

Not all strategies will work for all families equally, or even for the same family at all times. You'll most likely need to practice a strategy a few times before it clicks with your family. Don't aim for perfection. Practice and progress work best in the long run.

In general, we recommend picking one strategy that feels most doable for your family this week rather than trying many strategies at once. You'll probably need to adjust a strategy to make it work for your unique child and family situation.

Here are the five PAUSE strategies at a glance:

P **Plan the boundaries:** Set rules ahead of time and let the devices help enforce them.

A **Anticipate the transition:** Use warnings, timers, and a bridge activity so stopping isn't sudden.

U **Understand the function:** Notice what job the screen is doing for your child.

S **Set up screen-free zones:** Protect meals and bedtime.

E **Exemplify healthy habits:** Your own screen habits shape your child's.

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Strategy 1: Plan the Boundaries

PAUSE

Choose the routines and rules ahead of time, then let the device be the one to say "time's up."

Kids with ADHD can find it hard to keep track of time and hold a plan in mind. This can lead to confusion, arguments, and refusals when it's time to end screen time. Communicating the expectations clearly, calmly, and consistently is critical. Make sure kids understand the rules, so it's not a surprise when you enforce a boundary.

Start with the foundation. It's easier to hold to a limit you've already chosen than one you're making up on the spot. So decide on your family rules ahead of time: when screens can be on, when they're off, and which spaces stay screen-free. Create routines about when screens are and are not available (e.g., not at mealtimes, not right before school or bedtime). Write these rules down and put them somewhere visible.

Let the device reinforce limits when possible. Every phone and tablet now has built-in controls that you can use to turn your plan into automatic limits. The four settings we'd set first:

Downtime. During this scheduled window (like an hour or two before bedtime through morning), only the apps you allow will open. Your child doesn't have to resist the device, and you don't have to be the enforcer.

App limits. A specific game or app has a daily cap. When time is up, the app closes.

Password required for purchases. Spending stops being a surprise.

Turn off autoplay. Turn it off wherever you can. Save games that can't be paused for weekends.

This can take time to set up. But it'll save time and stress down the road when the limits are automatic versus parent-enforced each time. For step-by-step help, Common Sense Media's Parents' Ultimate Guide to Parental Controls covers every device. And Apple and Google each publish plain-language setup pages.

Why it works: The parent training approaches that have the strongest evidence for improving ADHD-related behaviors rely on clear expectations set in advance and consistent follow-through (Dekkers et al., 2022). Device controls help make some of this follow-through automatic and consistent.

Strategy 2: Anticipate the transition

P A U S E

Stopping is often the hardest part for an ADHD brain. Planning the transition ahead of time can help it go more smoothly.

Think of a pilot getting ready to fly a plane. It's important for them to plan the landing before they take off. You don't want them to start figuring this out mid-flight.

Start with a bridge. A bridge activity is something your child enjoys that starts the moment screens go off: the trampoline, the park, a snack, the dog, a bath with the good bubbles. "Screens, then park" gives your child something to move toward, not just something to lose. It's best to choose a bridge activity ahead of time when everyone is calm. Have it ready before time is up. At first, use the same bridge activity. Eventually, you can try varying the bridge activity to keep it exciting for your child.

Warnings at 10 and five minutes. When parents say the same words every time and then follow through with their prompt, kids learn that the prompt is a cue: "This is your 10-minute warning." Then, five minutes later say, "Five more minutes and then it's snack time." Get close when you say it. A hand on the shoulder or crouching to eye level works far better than calling from the kitchen. A child deep in a game may not register a voice.

Hold the feeling and the limit at the same time. "I know you're not ready, and it's still time." Then stop talking. If asking for more time sometimes works, your child will keep asking.

Let the timer be the bad guy. Visual timers are a common tool for ADHD support. Usually it displays a shrinking colored disk or an hourglass. Unlike a kitchen timer or the timer on your phone, a visual timer, placed where kids can see it, lets kids see time passing. This is important because kids with ADHD often have time blindness — they don't feel the passage of time in the same way. They may genuinely find it hard to believe that time is up. A visual timer also takes the responsibility off of you. "The timer says time's up" is easier for both of you than "I said it's time to turn it off."

Praise the stop. "You turned it off when the timer went off. That was hard, and you did it." Remember that stopping is *really hard* for the ADHD brain. If you see that this is really hard for your child and they're still stopping, don't hesitate to celebrate this win.

Why it works: A bridge activity allows for something enjoyable afterwards, rather than stopping cold. Warnings give the brain time to start shifting, making the transition easier by the second or third prompt when it's time to stop. A timer helps make the passage of time feel real, and reduces the challenge of time blindness. Praise and consistency are key strategies for parenting kids with ADHD (Dekkers et al., 2022).

Try Parent Coach, Understood's digital screen time coach for parents, to get strategies tailored to your situation with screen time. Share what you're struggling with, and it responds with personalized support and a strategy to try, in about three minutes.



Strategy 3: Understand the function

Ask what the screen is doing for your child. Then make sure it's not the only tool in the toolbox.

Parents — and especially parents of kids with ADHD — sometimes use screens to help their kids regulate their emotions and behavior. For example, parents may use a screen to help their child through an afterschool meltdown, an overwhelming birthday party, or any other difficult situation. Screens are good at decreasing in-the-moment stress, and they can work in the short term to prevent meltdowns. But they don't teach kids how to cope with big feelings. And we know that kids with ADHD need extra support to learn to manage their emotions.

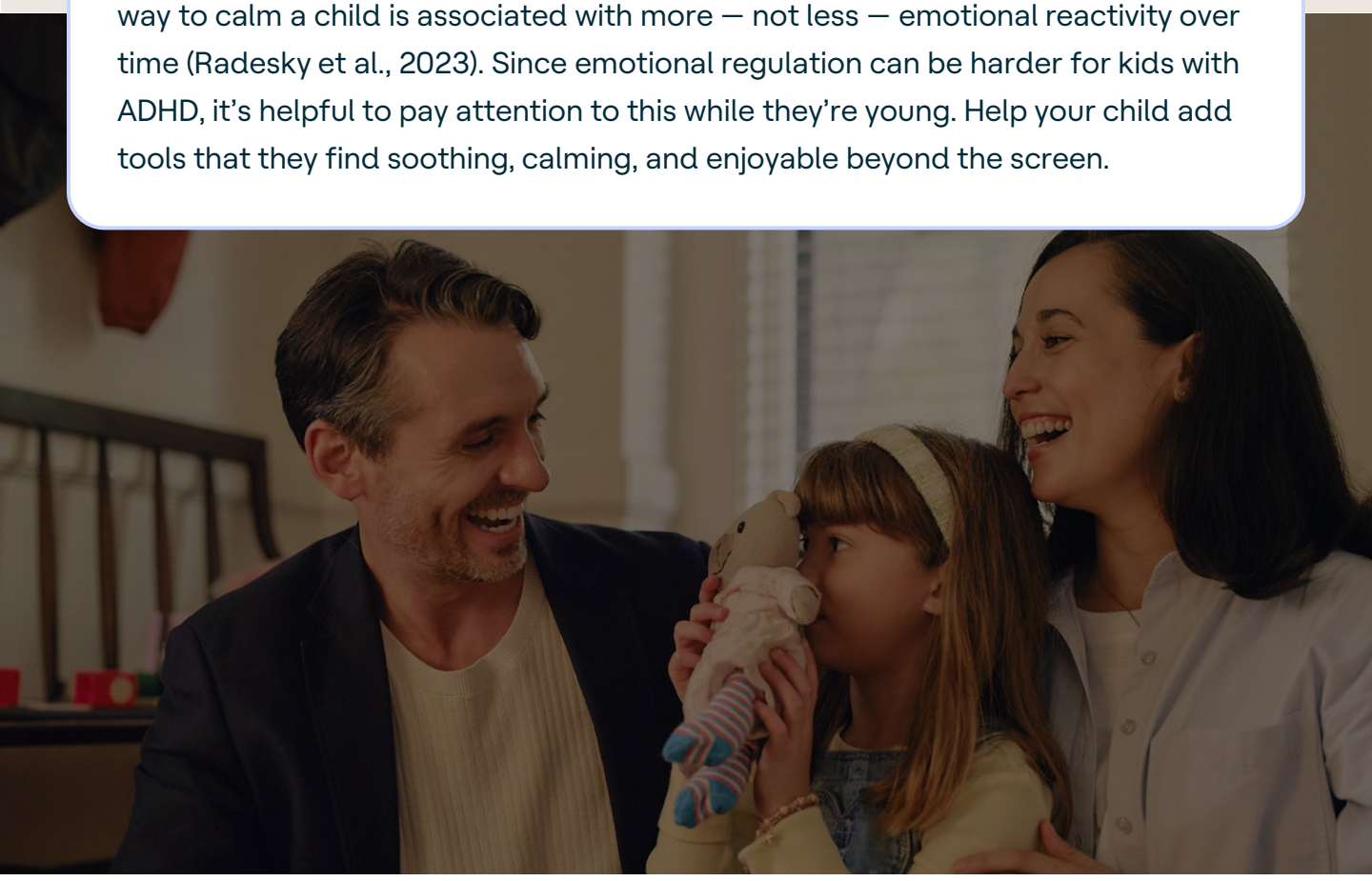
The goal isn't to take the tool away. It's to make sure it isn't the *only* tool.

> **Name the function.** What makes your child reach for a screen? Boredom? A big feeling? A loud room? A hard transition? Nobody to talk with? Knowing why your child is using a screen can help you think of alternatives.

Add calming tools to your toolbox. With your child, build a short list of other things that do the same job: headphones and music, a weighted blanket, a fidget, a snack, a walk, a quiet corner, audiobooks, or a card game. The best time to add to the toolbox is when a child is already calm.

Phase out, don't immediately remove. If a screen is the only thing that works after school, keep it for now and add one other calm-down approach alongside it. You can also add time limits, plus any tweaks to improve the content of what your child is watching.

Why it works: Research in younger children found that using a device as the main way to calm a child is associated with more — not less — emotional reactivity over time (Radesky et al., 2023). Since emotional regulation can be harder for kids with ADHD, it's helpful to pay attention to this while they're young. Help your child add tools that they find soothing, calming, and enjoyable beyond the screen.



Strategy 4: Set up screen-free zones

P A U S E

Creating screen-free places and times can help families remember to put away devices. Family meals and bedtime are great places to start.

The AAP recommends that parents consider screen-free zones such as bedrooms, mealtimes, and car rides. Screen-free zones work well because they're easy to remember and predictable. They also cut down on power struggles and prevent decision fatigue. While you'll find multiple options for zones in the Family Media Plan, there are two we particularly want to highlight here.

Family meals: Everyone is already in the same place. Phones (parents' phones, too, unless they're absolutely needed) go in a basket or another room. Everyone benefits from screen-free time, as well as having meaningful connection with family.

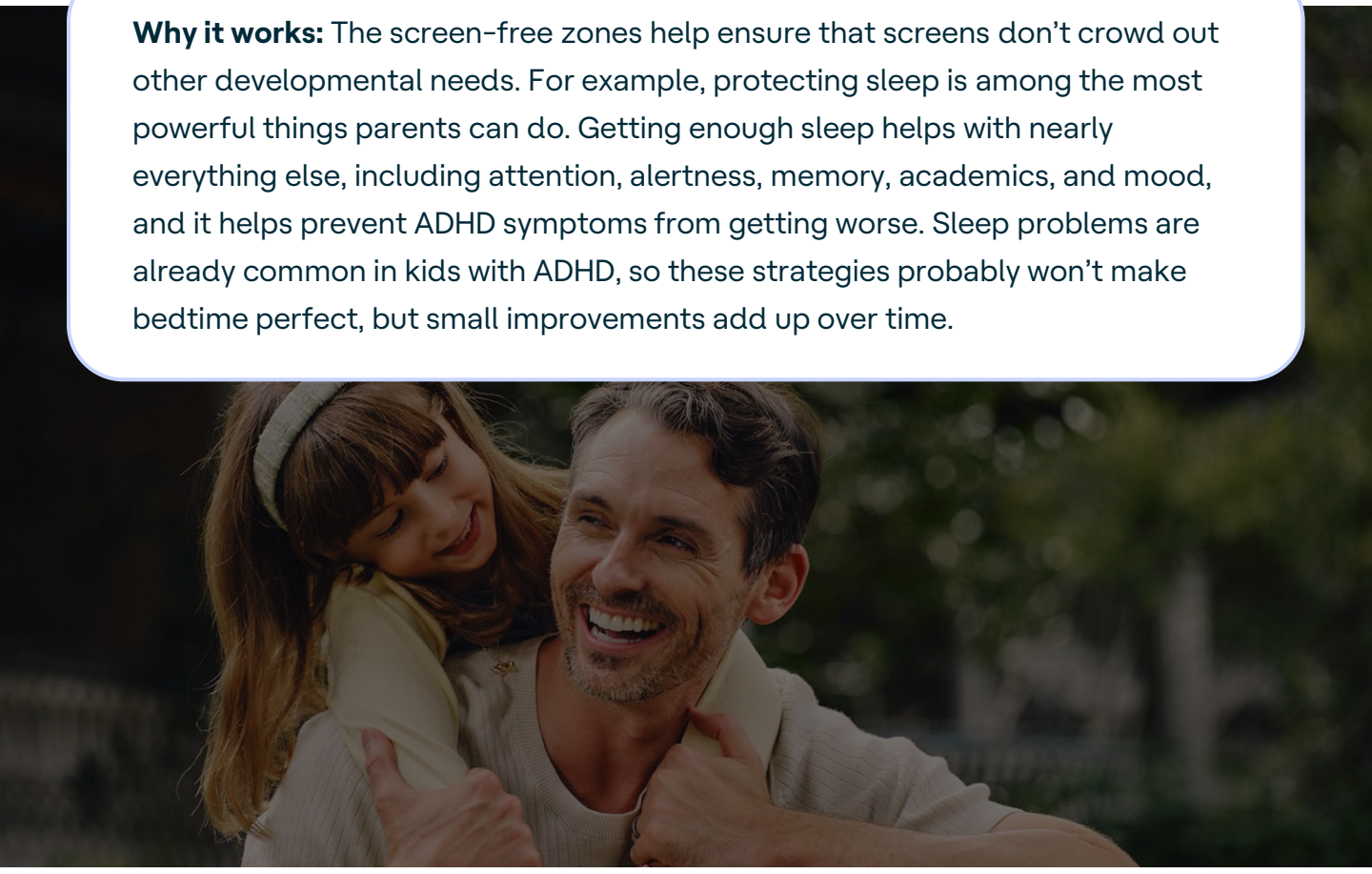
Bedtime: This is a common pain point for kids with ADHD. Sleep problems are already common with ADHD — and screens make them worse. A bad night of sleep tends to increase symptoms of ADHD, as well as adding challenges with mood (Cavalli et al., 2021; Cortese et al., 2009; Sung et al., 2008). Because sleep, and winding down in general, can already be so hard for the ADHD brain, targeted strategies are critical. Here are some to try:

- **Set an evening endpoint.** Turn screens off at a set time before bed, at the same time every night, with a "Downtime" setting doing the enforcing (see Strategy 1). At least one hour before bedtime is recommended, but even longer is better (e.g., no screens two hours before bedtime).

- **Park the devices.** Recreational devices charge in one spot outside the child's bedroom, where they cannot be accessed overnight. Keep anything your child needs for medical, communication, or accessibility reasons. Devices inside the bedroom are way too tempting when it's hard to sleep.

Create calming bedtime routines. Add soothing bedtime activities that your child looks forward to. For younger children, this might include bath time, free quiet play, and story time. For older elementary-age kids, it might look more like a shower, reading with or without a parent, or listening to a sleep story. Even though a sleep story may be on the device, listening to something calming can be a great replacement for viewing a screen.

Why it works: The screen-free zones help ensure that screens don't crowd out other developmental needs. For example, protecting sleep is among the most powerful things parents can do. Getting enough sleep helps with nearly everything else, including attention, alertness, memory, academics, and mood, and it helps prevent ADHD symptoms from getting worse. Sleep problems are already common in kids with ADHD, so these strategies probably won't make bedtime perfect, but small improvements add up over time.



Strategy 5: Exemplify healthy habits

P A U S E

Your habits teach more than your rules. And your screen time is allowed to look different from your child's.

In a study of more than 10,000 young adolescents, parents' own screen use around their kids was linked to more screen time in the kids (Nagata et al., 2025). In other words, the more parents used screens around their kids, the more kids also tended to use screens. In younger children, researchers saw some small negative associations from using a device in a child's presence (Mallawaarachchi et al., 2024; Toledo-Vargas et al., 2025). The AAP puts it simply: "Kids notice what we do. Put your own phone down during meals and bedtime."

This doesn't mean that parents and children should never use screens when they're together. In fact, using media together has been linked to better thinking skills in young children (Mallawaarachchi et al., 2024). So make time for family movie nights, play interactive games that include everyone, and look at family photo albums and baby pictures. These activities are opportunities to relax, connect, and have fun together.

Keep in mind that your rules can be different from your child's, and that's fair. Nobody hands a 5-year-old the car keys. That's not unfair — driving asks for judgment, reaction time, and impulse control that a 5-year-old's brain isn't ready for yet. Screens are the same. Your brain is fully developed. Your child's isn't. Different readiness, different rules. If your child says, "But you're on *your* phone," you can tell them that your brain is older, and theirs is still developing. You can say, "It's my job to protect your brain." Be intentional about why and when rules differ, but please know that you can and should have different rules than your child.

What to do:

Pick two or three screen-free zones. Meals. Bedtime. The car ride home. Phone away, on purpose, where your child can't see it.

Do some screen use together. Co-watching, co-playing, and asking "What's happening in this game?" turn screen time into conversation and connection.

Narrate your slips, and how you bring yourself back. "I said I'd put my phone down at dinner and I didn't. Starting over." Your child learns that pitfalls aren't failure, and sees you modeling how to reset with self-compassion.

If you have ADHD too, lean on the rules you set in Strategy 1 ("Plan the boundaries"). Many parents of kids with ADHD have ADHD themselves. The same digital features and ADHD symptoms that can make screens hard for your child can make it hard for you too (Chronis-Tuscano et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017). If you're having trouble with screen time, that's not bad parenting. It just means you also deserve strategies.

Why it works: Often the best strategies are the ones most in our control. The research suggests that even small changes in our own behavior can make a difference for our kids. Working on our screen time habits shows our kids that it's hard for us, too. And it also makes a little more space for what kids need most: connection and learning from you. It's not easy, and that's actually part of the gift you bring. By observing how you talk about screens and navigate challenges around screens, your child is actively learning how to do the same, laying the foundation for a healthier relationship with screens moving forward.

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