



# Monthly Parenting Tip from the ACFC

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## Essential Strategies for Internet Safety

The digital world is now woven into every aspect of our children's lives—schoolwork, friendships, entertainment and identity. The internet is both an incredible resource and a complex environment for kids and teens. It offers connection, creativity and learning—but it also presents real risks like cyberbullying, privacy concerns and addictive screen habits. Our goal isn't to shield children completely from technology—it's to help them navigate it thoughtfully, safely and confidently.

Here are the first 3 of our **8 Essential Strategies** to help your family build safe, healthy, connected digital habits.

### 1. Start With Family Meetings: Set a Family Media Plan Together

One of the foundational tools of Active Parenting is **family meetings** — structured conversations where everyone's voice is heard. Use these meetings to:

- Create a Family Media Plan with rules for screen time, online behavior and acceptable apps.
- Discuss *why* these guidelines matter—not just *what* the rules are.
- Include your child in the planning process to encourage ownership and accountability.
- Ask your child what apps they use and *why* they like them.
- Discuss the pros and cons of apps or devices together.
- Listen without jumping to judgment

Encourage them to come to you when they encounter something confusing or upsetting online. When children feel heard, they're more likely to stay open about their digital experiences. This collaborative approach turns tech limits into a shared plan rather than a top-down mandate. Collaboration creates ownership—and ownership increases cooperation. The best way to protect our children is to remain their primary source of guidance—here are some guidelines for a Tech Family Meeting:

- **Establish Emotional Safety First:** Children are more likely to come to parents with online concerns if they know they won't be immediately judged or lose their devices.
- **Focus on Trust, Not Just Rules:** While boundaries are necessary, digital safety starts with a relationship where kids feel heard and respected. Active Parenting advises using caution against rigid, blanket rules like "*no smartphones before high school*". Such rules can be difficult to enforce and may even encourage secrecy.
- **Use Active Communication:** Shift the focus from "monitoring" to "mentoring." Ask open-ended questions about the games they play or the creators they follow.

### 2. Establish Emotional Safety

Make it explicit: "*You won't lose your device just for telling us the truth.*" When problems happen, use calm problem-solving and logical, related consequences instead of yelling or blanket punishments. This "No Yelling Plan" helps kids come to you sooner—before small issues become big ones.

### 3. Balance "Freedom Within Limits"

Avoid the extremes of "Digital Dictator" or "Tech Doormat." Aim for **freedom within limits**—clear, consistent boundaries with room for growth as kids show responsibility. Examples include device-free meals or no phones after bedtime. Stay flexible: adjust limits as skills develop and avoid rigid blanket bans that can encourage deception. These limits shouldn't feel like punishment—they should feel like guidelines built with respect and trust.

To learn more about effective parenting skills, visit the Active Parenting Online Video Library. These helpful videos are offered free of charge by the ACFC in partnership with Active Parenting. Guidance and help are available for parents of children of all ages. To access the Online Video Library, go to the **ACFC website**, click on the Active Parenting tab, and follow the instructions on how to view the videos.

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