Learning how to balance time spent online with all of life’s other activities is one of the great challenges of the digital age. Youth leaders and parents can help youth feel empowered to use technology in a way that enhances their relationships, improves their wellbeing, and makes them more productive. This guide addresses technology challenges and solutions to help families and communities work towards digital health.
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iKeepSafe

iKeepSafe Mission + Vision
The iKeepSafe mission is to provide a safe digital landscape for children, schools, and families by supporting the protection of student privacy, while advancing learning in a digital culture. To support this mission, we provide data privacy certifications to technology companies, educational resources to schools, and information to the community.

About iKeepSafe
The Internet Keep Safe Coalition© (iKeepSafe) certifies digital products as compliant with state and federal requirements for handling protected personal information. We help organizations achieve and maintain compliance through product assessments, monthly monitoring, annual training, and assistance with remediation.

Governors, First Spouses, and State Attorneys General from throughout the United States joined with law enforcement agencies, and child safety advocates in the formation of the Internet Keep Safe Coalition© (iKeepSafe) a national effort promoting the safe and healthy use of technology. iKeepSafe was founded by Jacalyn S. Leavitt, former First Lady of Utah, in 2005. Over the past decade, iKeepSafe has evolved into a leading organization trusted internationally by families, educators, and industry. Visit our resources page for parent and educator content.

This publication was sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Foundation

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
Foundation
Introduction and Instructions for Youth Leaders

Maintaining a balance of online and offline experiences is key to enjoying a healthy and happy life. We want parents and leaders to have the resources they need to effectively guide youth to use technology in a way that enhances their relationships, improves their health and wellbeing, and makes them more productive.

Teaching Cyberbalance to 6-12th Grade Youth is designed to address the technology challenges identified in iKeepSafe’s Cyberbalance in a Digital Culture research, and pilot research surveying parents, to help families work towards cyberbalance and digital health.

The materials in this Course are designed to be presented in two youth meetings. The first meeting will introduce and discuss cyberbalance, and the second meeting will provide supporting youth activities. Leaders should plan to distribute information to parents in advance and give them the option to attend the meetings with their youth.

Meeting Preparation for Youth Leaders:

- Watch the Wise Tech Choices - Finding Balance Leader Video: Helping Teenagers Find Balance leader video found at iKeepSafe’s Youtube channel “Teaching Cyberbalance to Youth”.
- Review all content in this packet that includes information, step-by-step instructions, and activity plans to incorporate cyberbalance into your group meeting.
- Share with and instruct parents:
  - Share Cyberbalance Parent Tips handout (via email or handout) for background information and practical tips on modeling cyberbalance in their household.
  - Share Public Health: Why Encourage Cyberbalance? handout (via email or handout) for background information on the development of this course.
  - Invite parents to optionally attend meetings as observers.

Print copies of:

- This packet - Teaching Cyberbalance to 6-12th Grade Youth - Leader Guide (One per leader)
- Cyberbalance Parent Tips, 6-12th Grades (One per parent)
- Public Health: Why Encourage Cyberbalance Handout (One per parent)
- Internet Safety Pledge 6-12th Grades (One per youth)
- Media Log (One per youth)

In group meetings, help youth complete the following:

1. Read, commit to, and sign the Internet Safety Pledge 6-12th Grade.
2. Watch the videos “Finding Balance: Part 1” and “Finding Balance: Part 2” found at iKeepSafe Youtube Channel Teaching Cyberbalance to Youth.

3. Participate in the Learning Activities to demonstrate what they have learned about balancing screen time.

4. As a group, discuss the technology environment desired to establish and create rules for future meetings.

5. Share with their family, group leader, and group, what they have learned.

**Group Meeting Suggestion**

It is suggested that the content in this training be delivered in two, one-hour youth meetings as outlined in the Group Discussion and Learning Activities Leader Guide. Parents should receive all parent handouts in advance by paper or email. Parents should be invited to observe, if desired.

**Meeting 1:**
- Introduce meeting and view videos
- Guide discussion
- Lead learning activities
- Review and questions

**Meeting 2:**
- Review from previous meeting
- Lead learning activities
- Discuss desired technology environment and rules for future meetings
Cyberbalance Information for Youth Leaders

Background on Cyberbalance
Preparing young adults for life means proactively teaching Cyberbalance. As leaders, you can help youth avoid the physical, social, and emotional health challenges that are associated with problematic use, or overuse, of digital tools.

Technology, media, and device use becomes problematic when it interferes with daily life and responsibilities. Losing sleep, procrastinating in school, replacing in-person social interaction with screen time, becoming emotionally dependent on social media approval, and weakening of attention span could all be consequences of an unbalanced life.

Lack of balance can harm our bodies as well as our minds. Not only can habitual or problematic media use interfere with the physical exercise we need, but spending so much time bending over our mobile devices, computers, and keyboards is leading to widespread chiropractic issues – particularly in the head, neck, shoulders, and back.

How do we manage these challenges?
The solution is not to take technology away, but to shed light on the benefits and drawbacks of digital tools, set appropriate limits, and encourage creative alternatives to, as well as smart use of, digital media.

Harnessing the potential for knowledge, social connection, and global communication while avoiding potential harm means learning skills like:
- Regulation: take breaks from screens and technology to curb emotional dependence
- Social vulnerability: reach out and connect with people offline
- Bystander skills: avoid sites that promote violence and harmful sexual content

6-12th Graders
At this age youth typically begin engaging in social media. It is important to note that most social media is not designed for or legal for children under 13, and those that are are subject to COPPA: the FTC’s federal law designed to help parents remain in control of what personal information websites and other online services can collect from their young children.

For the most part, teens use social media for the same reasons as adults – for benign social contact and entertainment. However, teens are shying away from traditional forms of social media popular with older generations, such as Facebook, and are using other apps with profiles and chat capabilities. Risks associated with “private” apps include GPS location services, that could make it easy for adults and minors to find one another, and the perception that apps are safer or more private places to sext.
Online gaming is incredibly popular with all ages, but particularly so with boys of high school and middle school age. In addition to the clear entertainment value of games, they can actually be educational, therapeutic, highly social, and a great way to develop problem solving skills. However, it is particularly easy for developing brains to get sucked into a problematic pattern of use that interferes with everyday life.

Youth at this age start wanting to be in more frequent contact with their friends, and digital communication can easily facilitate that. It is important to emphasize that these sorts of communication (i.e. texting, chatting, etc) is a supplement to real-life relationship development – not a replacement.
**Meeting 1**

Introduce the Cyberbalance topic, based on content for youth leaders in this packet. Have youth watch videos: “Finding Balance: Part 1” and “Finding Balance: Part 2” found at iKeepSafe’s Youtube channel “Teaching Cyberbalance to Youth”.

Discuss the following:

- Social norm your activities to be device-free. Explain the value of creating and maintaining spaces where the focus is on real-time, real-life relationships and activities. Emphasize that you know digital technology is not inherently a barrier to relationships, but that it is healthy and relaxing to put it aside.
- Explain that your online profiles are an extension and representation of you, not the whole you. A profile should be an honest depiction, but there is so much more to who you are.

After discussion, use these recommended games to teach your group about Balance with Technology. (Other terms for this are cyberbalance, or digital balance.) The suggested activities help highlight different ways of communicating and balancing offline and online activities.

**Device-Free List Activity**
You will need paper and pen or pencil for each youth.

Instructions: Have youth create a list of things they like that don’t involve a digital device. They can refer back to this list when necessary.

**Searching for Balance Activity**
You will need:
- Devices with internet access
- Digital notepad or word processing program for notes

Objective: Find out how much sleep, play, exercise, school work, and time with friends and family we should aim for to keep fit and healthy.

Say: A balanced lifestyle involves keeping fit and healthy by having the right amount of rest, sleep, work, physical activity, leisure, and recreation each day. But how much of all these should we have?

Organize your group into sections of three or four youth. Ask them to list out how much time they spend each week on activities like: sleeping, going to school, doing homework, at a job, hanging out, and playing sports or exercising.

Then, have each group research online for how much rest, sleep, work, physical activity, leisure,
and recreation is recommended for people in your age group to keep fit and healthy.

Have each group report back their research, and write down what they all found. Discuss everyone’s findings: Did they find the same information? Were there big differences in the research each group found? How many youth feel their routine matches the research you found?

Bonus: Have each group share how they know their internet research came from accurate sources; how do they know the website is reporting correct information? (hint: When was the web page published? Are other sources saying similar things, or is the research very different? Is the website trying to get you to buy something?)

Charades Activity (Optional if time allows)
You won’t need any materials for this activity, but youth may want to refer to their list of device-free activities from the previous activity.

Gather up your group. Ask:
What are some things you do for fun, on the computer/internet, and outside?

Say: Think of one thing you like to do with technology, and one thing you like to do without technology. But don’t say it out loud!

Taking turns, have one youth at a time act out their activities while the others try to guess what it is. When you guess their activities, switch to the next youth.

Ask: What are some positive things that come from being on the internet and on screens? What are some negatives? (Hint: How does your body and mind feel? Who are you getting to hang out with?)

Media Log Take Home Activity
You will need: One copy of the Media Log for each youth

Say: We are going to keep a media journal and record all of our media consumption for one week. Log your media use for a full week and report back when we meet again. Use the handout (included at the end of this packet in the appendix) to log what you’ve read, viewed, and listened to as well as the device you used to access the media.

Meeting 2
Review all topics from Meeting 1, ask for questions and comments about what youth thought about throughout the week.

Media Log Discussion
Discuss the media logs kept by youth throughout the past week (or time between meetings).
Suggested discussion questions:
- Did you notice any patterns in your log?
- What are some daily patterns and some weekly patterns?
- Did you find it hard to log all your screen time and device use?
- How long did you spend with digital devices each day?
- What device did you spend the most time on?
- What activity did you spend the least amount of time on?
- Are you surprised by any of your logs?

**Offline and Online Gaming Activity**

You will need:
- A location and equipment to play a sport (basketball, soccer, ultimate frisbee, etc)
- Mobile devices with internet access

Plan your meeting so that you have enough time to:
1. Play an online sports game
2. Play an offline sports game
3. Regroup briefly

First, youth play a game on mobile devices that mimics a sport. Examples include NBA Jam or FIFA Mobile, but your youth may have their own suggestions. After playing online, gather up the youth and start a real, offline game of the same sport. Make sure you have access to the equipment and courts needed for your chosen sport.

Ask: How does it feel to play this game with technology? Without technology? What is it like to be in a team? Solo? Which activity is more physically engaging? Mentally engaging? Socially engaging? Which is more convenient to schedule, and how can we resolve scheduling complications?

**Skit Activity** (Optional if time allows)

You won’t need any materials for this activity, unless the youth decide to use props for their skit.

Say: We’re going to act out some scenarios that may be familiar to you all. How many of you have gotten “stuck” playing a video game? Scrolling on Instagram late into the night? We are going to break into groups and act out a few skits.

Let the youth form groups, and give them around ten minutes to prepare their skit. Here are some scenarios to get you started:
- It’s the weekend, but you and your friends haven’t heard from Jim in a while. You usually text each other and try to meet up. You see that he’s logged in to your favorite online game. What do you all do?
- You’ve been talking in a group chat all evening. It’s getting late, and the conversation is dwindling, but you don’t want to miss anything funny that comes up. You put your phone
under your pillow before trying to sleep.

Say: While you are practicing, think about the challenges and strategies we have learned about Cyberbalance. What are some ways you and your friends can feel connected offline as well as online?

Call the groups back and have your youth perform their skits.

**PLEDGE Review and signing**
You will need: One Internet Safety Pledge 6-12th Grades per youth

Go over the contents of the Internet Safety Pledge 6-12th Grades together, have each youth sign the pledge. Emphasize the importance of this pledge to youth, their family, their community.

**Final Discussion**
Discuss desired technology environment and rules for future meetings.
## Media Log

**USE THE CHART BELOW TO KEEP TRACK OF THE MEDIA YOU USE THIS WEEK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Device (phone, tablet, computer)</th>
<th>Activity (Facebook, homework, research, games, browsing, etc)</th>
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Internet Safety Pledge for 6-12th Grade Youth

I pledge to be an ethical, respectful, responsible, and resilient digital citizen.

- I spend time with my friends and family without technology, media, or screens.
- I keep a list of my favorite things to do without technology.
- I take regular breaks from screens.
- I maintain good posture when using digital devices.

- I respect the creative property of others by using legal websites to watch TV and movies or listen to music.
- I cite my sources when using others’ content or information in a school project.
- I respect myself and others by choosing and sharing healthy content that supports my body and brain’s healthy development.

- I protect my privacy by customizing privacy settings in my online profiles and services.
- I share my personal information (like my age, full name, address, phone number, name of school, passwords, or images) online only with my parents permission.

- I know that nothing online is private.
- I post things that build my positive online reputation.
- I only post images of or text about my friends online that creates positive reputation.

- I am kind online, and offline.
- I only share images of others with their consent.
- I take 10 deep breaths before posting something when I feel angry or upset.

- I keep passwords to myself.
- I create strong, difficult to guess passwords and change them regularly.
- I only open links that I recognize.
Part of being an ethical, respectful, responsible, and resilient digital citizen is making healthy content choices.

This is what I do if I see porn or unhealthy content:
ALERT myself: This is porn. I know unhealthy content when I see it.
CLOSE the lid / turn off my device.
TAKE ACTION Talk to a parent or trusted adult. They can help me.

- I ACT when I see something that makes me uncomfortable, embarrassed, or troubled.
- I ACT when I see unhealthy content.
- I ACT if a friend or adult shows me unhealthy content.

Here are some things that I know:
- Talking to my parents or trusted adults about uncomfortable experiences will never get me in trouble.
- Feeling curious about or attracted to porn is normal, not shameful.
- True friends and trustworthy adults will never ask me to look at porn or violence.
- Devices that connect to the internet are used in family spaces like the living room.

Certain parts of my body are private, and private parts have special rules. This means that my body is mine and mine alone, and I am always allowed to say no to someone. My body safe boundaries apply in the digital world and in the physical world. I ACT if:
- Someone offers me a reward like money or gifts for something that violates my body safe boundaries.
- Someone threatens to take something good away or do something bad if I won’t keep a secret.
- Someone tries to tell me that my body safe boundaries are not important or not normal.

MY NAME: _____________________________________
MY SIGNATURE: ________________________________
Cyberbalance Tips for 6-12th Grade Parents

Create a healthy media environment in your home.

Parents, the most important tip for you to remember when establishing and maintaining Cyberbalance in your household is to model healthy online/offline balance for your children. Explain the importance of having a varied diet of experiences in order to support family members’ overall development and, in particular, their social development.

Teach them by example. Show them what it looks like to value face-to-face interaction and time away from digital realities. Make a special effort to remove distractions like cell phones, computers, and the TV when they come home from school or spend time with friends, and ask them to tell you about what they learned or did.

Note that most social media networks, such as Facebook or Instagram, are not for children under 13. There are some designed for youth under 13, and these have built-in, required parental consent and protective measures.

Top ten digital parenting tips:
1. Model healthy online/offline balance and engage in digital parenting.
3. Turn off screens at least one hour before bedtime.
4. Charge mobile devices away from the bedroom.
5. Enjoy media-free meals where the emphasis is focused on building strong family relationships.
6. Encourage the habit of completing tasks like homework, before engaging in social media, mobile device conversations or games.
7. Address obsessive and addictive behaviors.
8. Write a list of device-free activities with your child that they enjoy.
9. Discuss managing strong emotions when using digital devices. Resolve conflicts offline, not online.
10. Provide varied experiences to support social, emotional, and physical well-being. Technology is not there to replace family, friends, or staying physically fit.

Why should parents teach cyberbalance?

Today’s rising generation has been immersed in the digital world since birth. While this means they are extremely tech-savvy, it means that online versus offline realities are not as clearly differentiated and they can easily become over-dependent on technology.

Now, more than ever, parents need to help their “digital natives” thrive by proactively setting limits on where and when media can be accessed. The media environment of your home makes a tremendous impact on your children.
This can understandably be difficult, when adults’ work responsibilities, communications, and entertainment can all rely on digital tools. However, making time to bond offline builds your relationship and demonstrates to youth how valuable offline activities can be.

**Solidifying your Child’s Cyberbalance lessons**
At this age, youth continue to need assistance in transportation and help to manage their schedule and plan their weeks. However, they are also beginning to autonomously make plans and choose how they spend their time. As parents in the digital culture, teaching youth responsibility and time management must include strategies for enjoying a diverse diet of experiences and activities: with technology and without.

Try tracking screen time at home for a week, and have your youth think of a couple rules they see as suitable for their age group, using positive wording. For example:

- I keep a list of activities I can enjoy without technology.
- I take regular breaks from screens.
- I spend an equal amount or more time with friends offline as I do online.
- I finish homework and chores before watching TV, playing video games, using the computer, or going online.
- I focus on one activity or task at a time.
- I charge my devices away from my bedroom in family spaces.
- I turn my phone off a couple hours before going to bed in order to have time to unwind.

Highlight the importance of a behavior by asking your youth to self-monitor during specific online activities. Self-monitoring helps them become more aware of what they are doing and increases the likelihood of modifying or specifying their actions. Encouraging further analysis can lead them to discriminate between effective and ineffective strategies – empowering youth to independently recognize healthy use of technology.
Why encourage Cyberbalance? Public Health Research Summary

Kids’ bodies, minds, and relationships are influenced by their digital habits.

Fostering a healthy technology environment
Device use impacts sleep, focus, and physical wellness. Developing bodies and minds are particularly vulnerable to health risks. The following reports from academic research, public health, and popular news track the prominence of Cyberbalance challenges and demonstrate the need for awareness, education, and behavior change to address them.

Parental Guidance
Kids rely on parents and leaders to help them manage their time and establish healthy tech habits.1, 2 Although many parents monitor and limit their children’s digital presence in some way, either manually (social media profiles, web history), or with technology-based tools (filtering, blocking), most parents still report concern about the amount of time their child spends using digital devices and are looking for guidance.3 In families with teenage children, connecting on social media platforms can enhance parent-child relationships.4 To reduce risk of negative health effects, parents and leaders must consider variables of device use such as frequency and duration, the use of multiple devices simultaneously, and the proximity of the screen.5

Body
Bending our necks to lean over phones increases the volume of strain on the neck to about 60 pounds, and over time can lead to the development of a ‘dowagers hump’ even in teenagers.6 Good posture, and resisting the “text neck” (where we hang our heads and slump over devices), helps us maintain high self-esteem, increase positive mood, and build resistance to stress – in addition to simply avoiding muscle strain.7 Changes like more sedentary playtime at home and shorter more physically limited in-school breaks for movement are reducing the opportunities children have to increase blood flow to the brain.8 Free play where kids roll, flip, and jump sideways, upside down, and right side up is necessary to developing core strength, balance, and a strong sensory system.9

Vision
Blurred or damaged vision and dry eyes are common consequences of the near constant exposure to the blue light (high-energy visible light, HEV) that computer and device screens emit.10, 11 Young eyes are more vulnerable to blue light, because these light rays beeline to the back of a child’s eye – where lack of pigmentation means less protection.12 In extreme cases, symptoms may include words and images moving or shaking on the screen (usually due to eye alignment issues), or even early macular degeneration (leading to blindness).13, 14
Sleep
Charging phones in the bedroom or using devices right up until bedtime reduces our capability to relax and sleep soundly.\textsuperscript{15} While the blue light from digital screens can boost attention and mood in the daytime, it interferes with melatonin – the sleep inducing hormone – and the body’s circadian rhythm, leading to patterned sleep disruption.\textsuperscript{16, 17} In addition, sleep deprivation interferes with the development of key leadership skills, such as creative problem solving and emotional stability.\textsuperscript{18}

Mind
Multitasking reduces productivity and efficiency, and it shrinks attention span.\textsuperscript{19} Although kids may claim it’s possible to watch TV and do homework simultaneously, the brain can only truly concentrate on one thing at a time.\textsuperscript{20} When trying to multitask with multiple screens, the rapid shifting of your gaze – at least 4 times per minute – precludes effective learning by limiting focus to a few seconds per screen at a time.\textsuperscript{21}

References
Healthy Content Choices & Cyberbalance Links Guide

Download all Leader Guides at [https://ikeepsafe.org/scouting/](https://ikeepsafe.org/scouting/)

Teaching Healthy Content Choices to K-5th Grade Youth

- **iKeepSafe Youtube Playlist: Wise Tech Choices: Healthy Content** (Find leader and youth videos here) - [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcCI70ryDObauySEf2PrmaJx9CwMm3zFk](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcCI70ryDObauySEf2PrmaJx9CwMm3zFk)


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Teaching Cyberbalance to 6-12th Grade Youth

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