THE **SOCIAL** INSTITUTE

Tech Check Guide: Strong Settings for Families

Here's a quick guide to help you and your family take control of your tech use. It's packed with simple tips to customize settings across streaming platforms, social media, gaming, and devices. Whether you're limiting distractions, setting age-appropriate boundaries, or creating safer online spaces, this guide puts the power in your hands. **Pick the settings that work best for you, so you can feel confident that tech is working for you — not the other way around.** Take some time to explore these options together and build healthier tech habits as a team!

To make this checklist interactive and check off items, create a personal copy of this document by going to File > Make a Copy

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1. Streaming Platforms and Smart TVs

- ☐ **Turn Off Autoplay**
  - Stops the next episode or video from playing automatically, so you're in control of how much you watch.
  - **Netflix:** Go to Settings > Profile & Parental Controls > Playback Settings > Uncheck "Autoplay next episode in a series."
  - **YouTube:** Go to Settings > Playback > Toggle off "Autoplay on Home" or the player.
  - Amazon Prime Video: Go to Playback Settings > Turn off "Allow Auto-Play."
  - **Hulu:** Go to Settings > Autoplay > Toggle off "Autoplay."
  - **Smart TVs:** Check your TV's settings menu for autoplay settings under Streaming Apps or Playback Options.
- ☐ **Set Up Kids' Profiles**
  - Shows only age-appropriate content, making it easier to find what's meant for you.

- **Netflix:** Go to Add a Profile > Select “Kids” > Adjust maturity level restrictions.
- **Hulu:** Go to Account Settings > Profiles > Add a Profile > Toggle “Kids” mode.
- **Amazon Prime Video:** Go to Settings > Parental Controls > Add Kids Profile.
- **Smart TVs:** Many Smart TVs allow you to create profiles for different users. Go to User Settings > Add a Profile > Select “Kids” Mode (if available).

☐ **Restrict Content by Age**

- Blocks content not made for your age group, so it’s easier to stick to what’s appropriate.
- **Netflix:** Go to Settings > Profile & Parental Controls > Profile Lock > Set a 4-digit PIN.
- **Amazon Prime Video:** Go to Settings > Parental Controls > Set a PIN to restrict by rating.
- **Hulu:** Go to Account Settings > Parental Controls > Set Content Restrictions by Age.
- **Smart TVs:** Access Parental Controls in the TV settings > Set age restrictions for viewing.
- **YouTube**: Go to Settings > General > Toggle “Restricted Mode.”
- **YouTube:** Tap the three dots next to a video > Select “Block.”
- **YouTube Kids:** Go to Settings > Child’s Profile > Toggle off Search.

☐ **Set Purchase Restrictions**

- Prevents accidental purchases or rentals, so you don’t have to deal with surprise charges.
- **Amazon Prime Video:** Go to Settings > Parental Controls > Require PIN for purchases.

☐ **Disable Ads or Previews**

- Keeps previews or ads from playing automatically, which can sometimes show stuff you don’t want to see.
- **Netflix:** Go to Account Settings > Playback Settings > Uncheck “Autoplay Previews.”
- **Hulu:** Enable Hulu Kids Mode > Profiles > Toggle on “Kids” mode.

☐ **Track viewing activity and time**

- Helps you or your family see how much time is spent watching and what’s being watched.
- **Netflix:** Go to Account Settings > Profile & Parental Controls > Viewing Activity.
- **YouTube:** Use Your Watch History to review videos viewed. Go to Settings > History.
- **Smart TVs:** Use the TV settings or third-party apps like Qustodio or Bark.

☐ **Lock access with a PIN Code**

- Keeps people from accessing certain apps, profiles, or settings without permission.
- **Netflix:** Go to Settings > Profile & Parental Controls > Profile Lock > Set a 4-digit PIN.
- **Amazon Prime Video:** Go to Settings > Parental Controls > Require PIN for purchases and restricted content.
- **Smart TVs:** On Samsung TVs, go to Settings > General > System Manager > Change PIN. Use Apps Lock under Parental Controls.

2. Mainstream Social Media (Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok)

- ☐ **Activate Family Pairing**
  - Helps set limits on screen time, block inappropriate content, and control direct messages, so the app feels safer.
  - **TikTok:** Settings > Family Pairing to set screen time, restricted content, and direct messages.
  - **Instagram:** Use Family Center to supervise account activity. Go to Settings > Supervision > Set Up Supervised Account (requires both parent and child accounts).
  - **Snapchat:** Use Family Center to see who your kids are interacting with (but not the content of messages).
- ☐ **Limit screen time**
  - It's easy to lose track of time scrolling. Setting a limit helps you stay balanced and leaves more time for other activities you enjoy.
  - **Instagram:** Go to Settings > Your Activity > Time Spent > Set Daily Time Limit.
  - **TikTok:** Go to Settings > Digital Wellbeing > Screen Time Management > Set Daily Screen Time Limit.
- ☐ **Enable account privacy**
  - Keeps your posts and stories visible only to people you approve, so random strangers don't see your stuff.
  - **Instagram:** Go to Settings > Privacy > Toggle "Private Account."
  - **TikTok:** Go to Settings > Privacy > Toggle "Private Account."
  - **Snapchat:** Go to Settings > Privacy Controls > "Who Can Contact Me" > Select "My Friends."
- ☐ **Disable Location Sharing**
  - Stops apps from sharing your location, so you're not broadcasting where you are to everyone.
  - **On Your Device:** Go to Settings > Location > Disable location sharing for social media apps.
  - **Snapchat:** Go to Settings > Privacy Controls > Location > Toggle on "Ghost Mode."
  - **TikTok:** Go to Settings > Privacy > Location Services > Toggle off "Location Sharing."
- ☐ **Receive Content Review Alerts**
  - Helps your family keep an eye out for risky posts or messages while still giving you space online.
  - Use third-party apps like **Bark or Qustodio** to monitor and flag content.
- ☐ **Restrict contact settings**
  - Lets only your friends message or snap you, keeping unwanted messages away.
  - **Instagram:** Go to Settings > Privacy > Messages > Limit who can DM.
  - **Snapchat:** Go to Settings > Privacy Controls > "Who Can Contact Me" > Select "My Friends."
  - **TikTok:** Go to Settings > Privacy > Direct Messages > Choose "Friends" or "No One."

- [ ] **Filter offensive comments and messages**
    - Automatically blocks hateful or inappropriate language, so you don't have to see it in comments or DMs.
    - **Instagram:** Go to Settings > Privacy > Hidden Words > Enable "Hide Comments" and "Advanced Message Filters."
    - **TikTok:** Go to Settings > Privacy > Comments > Filter All Comments > Enable.
- [ ] **Restrict who can duet or stitch their videos**
    - Stops strangers from interacting with your content in weird or uncomfortable ways.
    - **TikTok:** Settings > Privacy > Duet or Stitch > Choose "Friends" or "No One."

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3. Gaming Platforms

- [ ] **Set screen time limits**
    - Makes sure you don't spend all day gaming, giving you time for other things you enjoy.
    - **Xbox:** Go to Microsoft Family Safety > Set time limits for specific games.
    - **Nintendo Switch:** Use the Parental Controls App > Set Play-Time Limit.
- [ ] **Restrict content and multiplayer access**
    - Blocks inappropriate games and limits interactions with strangers while gaming.
    - **Xbox:** Go to Settings > Account > Family Settings > Content Restrictions.
    - **PlayStation:** Go to Settings > Family Management > Set age ratings and restrict multiplayer games.
- [ ] **Block access to specific games or apps**
    - Keeps you from playing games your family doesn't approve of or ones that could be a distraction.
    - **Xbox:** Go to Microsoft Family Safety > Child's Profile > Content Restrictions > Block specific games/apps.
- [ ] **Enable chat and communication filters**
    - Filters out harmful language or inappropriate chats, so online conversations are safer.
    - **Xbox:** Go to Settings > Privacy & Online Safety > Message Safety > Select "Child-Friendly."
    - **PlayStation:** Go to Settings > Family Management > Communication Restrictions > Restrict voice and text chat.
    - **Nintendo Switch:** Go to Settings > Parental Controls > Disable "Communicating with Others.
- [ ] **Use the Parental Controls app**
    - Helps manage gaming time, restrict in-game purchases, and control what games you can play.
    - **Nintendo Switch:** Download the Nintendo Parental Controls App > Manage playtime, purchases, and content ratings.
- [ ] **Set bedtime alarms**
    - Makes sure gaming stops at a reasonable time, so you can get enough sleep.

- **Nintendo Switch:** Go to Parental Controls App > Set Play-Time Limit > Add bedtime alarms.

☐ **Monitor in-game purchases**
- Tracks what's being spent on downloadable content or upgrades, so you don't accidentally overspend.
- Enable purchase notifications through the gaming account's linked email or app.

☐ **Enable screen recording notifications**
- Lets you know when your gameplay is being recorded or shared, so you're aware of your privacy.
- Go to Console Settings > Notifications > Alert when recording is active.

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4. Handheld Devices for Apple or Android (iPhone, iPad, Samsung Galaxy, etc.)

☐ **Set up Family Sharing**
- On Apple, this shares subscriptions like iCloud, Apple Music, or Apple TV+ and manage shared purchases. On Android, it centralizes family account management, allowing sharing of Google subscriptions and services.
- **Apple:** Settings > [Your Name] > Family Sharing > Add a Family Member.
- **Android:** Google Family Link > Create or join a family group > Share apps, YouTube Premium, Google One, and purchases.

☐ **Enable screen time monitoring**
- On Apple and Android, this allows parents to view app usage reports, manage screen time, and apply restrictions remotely.
- **Apple:** Settings > Screen Time > Family > Select your child's device.
- **Android:** Family Link App > Manage screen time and activity > View daily reports and set limits.

☐ **Track your child's location**
- On Apple, this tracks your child's location for safety and peace of mind. On Android, it uses Family Link to provide real-time location tracking for your child's device.
- **Apple:** Settings > [Their Name] > Find My > Share My Location > Use the Find My app on your device.
- **Android:** Google Family Link > Location > Enable tracking for the child's device.

☐ **Limit in-app purchases and downloads**
- On Apple, this prevents unauthorized purchases and ensures your approval for app downloads, subscriptions, and in-app purchases. On Android, it blocks unauthorized or inappropriate downloads and purchases.
- **Apple:** Settings > [Your Name] > Family Sharing > Ask to Buy > Toggle on for your child's account.
- **Android:** Google Play > Settings > Family > Parental Controls > Set restrictions for app downloads, in-app purchases, and ratings.

☐ **Enable App Limits**
- On Apple and Android, this encourages balanced usage by restricting time on potentially distracting apps.

- **Apple:** Settings > Screen Time > App Limits > Set limits for specific categories like social, gaming, or streaming apps.
- **Android:** Settings > Digital Wellbeing > App Timers > Set time limits for specific apps.

☐ **Create device-free times**
- On Apple, this helps create device-free times for activities like homework, meals, or sleep. On Android, Bedtime Mode reduces screen time during specific hours to promote healthy sleep habits.
- **Apple:** Settings > Screen Time > Downtime > Schedule periods when only essential apps are accessible.
- **Android:** Settings > Digital Wellbeing > Bedtime Mode > Schedule times for reduced device usage.

☐ **Restrict explicit content**
- On Apple and Android, this ensures children only access age-appropriate media.
- **Apple:** Settings > Screen Time > Content & Privacy Restrictions > Content Restrictions > Set limits for Music, Movies, TV Shows, and Apps.
- **Android:** Google Play > Settings > Family > Parental Controls > Filter content by ratings for apps, movies, and books.

☐ **Set communications limits**
- On Apple, this helps control who your child communicates with and when. On Android, it restricts interactions to approved contacts and ensures communication happens at appropriate times.
- **Apple:** Settings > Screen Time > Communication Limits > Limit contacts during allowed times and downtime.
- **Android:** Family Link > App Activity > Restrict usage of apps like messaging and social media during certain times.

☐ **Set Emergency Contacts:**
- Ensures your child can quickly contact trusted adults in an emergency.
- **Apple:** Settings > Emergency SOS > Set Up Emergency Contacts.
- **Android:** Settings > Safety & Emergency > Emergency Contacts.

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5. Smart Assistants (Alexa, Google)

☐ **Enable filters for music, videos, and language**
- Ensures all content played or spoken by the device is safe and suitable for everyone in your home.
- **Amazon Alexa:** Settings > Device Settings > Alexa Preferences > Voice Responses > Enable “Filter Explicit Content.”
- **Google Assistant**: Google Home App > Settings > Digital Wellbeing > Add Filter.

☐ **Use Parental Controls for Shopping**
- Prevents children from placing voice orders using Amazon Alexa.
- Go to Alexa App > Settings > Voice Purchasing > Require Confirmation Code.

☐ **Enable Digital Wellbeing routines**
- Create bedtime routines that limit interaction times.

6. Internet Browsing

- ☐ **Chrome**
  - **Enable SafeSearch:** Keeps search results clean by filtering out stuff you don't want popping up when you search..
    - Go to Settings > Search Settings > Turn on "SafeSearch Filters."
  - **Set Up Supervised Users:** Makes it easy to control which websites your child can visit, so they don't accidentally land on something sketchy.
    - Go to Google Family Link > Create child profiles > Manage sites they can visit.
  - **Disable Private Browsing/Incognito Mode:** Prevents kids from browsing without leaving a history.
    - Go to Google Family Link > App Activity > Disable Incognito.
- ☐ **Safari**
  - **Restrict Web Content:** Blocks adult sites so your child only sees age-appropriate content.
    - Go to Settings > Screen Time > Content & Privacy Restrictions > Web Content > Limit Adult Websites.
- ☐ **Bookmarks Folder (All Browsers):**
  - Saves time and keeps browsing safe by giving quick access to trusted websites without needing to search every time.
  - Add child-friendly websites to a folder in the bookmarks bar. Right-click on the bookmarks bar > Select "Add Folder" > Name it "Kid's Websites" > Add approved links. Then coach your child to use the folder to quickly find their favorite sites.

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7. Wi-Fi & Home Network

- ☐ **Activate Parental Controls**
  - Blocks specific websites, sets time limits, and makes the internet safer for everyone in your house.
  - Log in to your router's dashboard with your admin username and password (check the manual if you don't know them). Go to Parental Controls or Access Restrictions, then block certain websites, set filters, or create time schedules for internet use.
- ☐ **Use Another Network for Kids' Devices**
  - Keeps kids' devices separate from the main Wi-Fi, making it easier to set rules without messing up everyone else's internet.
  - Go to Wireless Settings > Guest Network and turn on the guest network. Name it something like "Kids' Network" and set a strong password. Add parental controls or bandwidth limits just for this network.
- ☐ **Set Up Device-Specific Restrictions**
  - If one device (like a gaming console or a younger sibling's device) needs more rules than others, you can set custom limits.

- Log in to the router dashboard and go to Device Management or Connected Devices. Find your child's device by name or MAC address. Add rules like time limits, blocked sites, or restricted services (e.g., no gaming during homework hours).

☐ **Enable Approved Websites**
- Instead of blocking bad sites, choose only the websites your child is allowed to visit. It's a super-secure way to control browsing.
- Go to Parental Controls in the router dashboard and add approved sites. Save the settings, and only those sites will be accessible.

☐ **Schedule Wi-Fi Access for Certain Times**
- Shutting off Wi-Fi at bedtime or during family time helps everyone unplug and focus.
- In your router dashboard, go to Parental Controls or Access Schedules. Pick your child's device and set times when Wi-Fi is on or off (e.g., 7:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m.).

☐ **Upgrade to a Family-Friendly Router**
- Some routers make managing screen time super simple with apps and built-in controls.
- Buy a router made for families, like Eero, Gryphon, or Netgear. Set it up using the guide it comes with, enable parental controls, and customize the settings for your family.

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8. Music Platforms

☐ **Filter out Explicit Content**
- Makes sure the music and podcasts your child listens to are appropriate and safe for their age.
- **On Spotify:** Go to Settings in the Spotify app. Toggle "Explicit Content" to Off. Or, alternatively, download the Spotify Kids app. Set up an account for your child and customize their playlists and controls for a safer listening experience.
- **On Apple Music:** Go to Settings > Screen Time > Content & Privacy Restrictions. Tap Content Restrictions > Music, Podcasts & News. Select Restrict Explicit.

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9. Smart Devices & Wearables on Smartwatches or Fitness Watches

☐ **Enable Schooltime Mode**
- Limits distractions during school hours.
- **Apple Watch:** Go to the Apple Watch app > Schooltime > Set start and end times.

☐ **Track activity**
- **Apple Watch:** Track your child's daily steps and activity trends, and set fitness goals to keep them moving. Open the Watch App > enable Activity Sharing.

☐ **Turn off Social Features**:
- Cuts out any unnecessary social features.

- **Fitbit:** Go to the Fitbit App > Family Account > Disable messaging and social challenges.

☐ **Enable Sleep Tracking Alerts**.
- Set reminders to enforce good sleep habits.
- **Apple Watch or Fitbit:** Go to the Sleep Settings in the app.

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10. Online Shopping (Amazon)

☐ **Enable Purchase Restrictions**:
- Stops kids from accidentally buying things or spending money without permission.
- Go to Settings > Parental Controls > Purchase Restrictions or enable 1-Click Purchase PIN. Use Household Accounts to manage permissions for each user.

☐ **Set Up Child Profiles**
- Creates a kid-friendly shopping experience with limits on what they can see and buy.
- Go to Settings > Household Accounts > Add a Child Profile. Assign spending limits or restrict access to certain categories.

☐ **Monitor and Approve Purchases**
- Lets you approve or reject what your child wants to buy before it goes through.
- Enable Approval Settings in Household Accounts for child profiles.

☐ **Use Gift Card Balance Instead of Credit Cards**
- Gives kids a set budget for shopping, so they don't overspend.
- Purchase a gift card and load it to a child's profile for controlled spending.

☐ **Enable Notifications for Orders and Shipments**
- Keeps you in the loop about what's being bought and when it's arriving.
- Go to Settings > Notifications > Shopping Notifications > Enable notifications for order confirmations, shipments, and refunds.