



# Screen Time and Your PDA Teenager

A guide for parents

Screens and gaming are a major flashpoint in many PDA households. This guide offers a different lens — one that helps you distinguish between genuine safety concerns and the regulation function that screens often serve for PDA teenagers.

## The Regulation Function of Screens

For many PDA teenagers, screens serve as one of the most effective regulation tools available. Gaming, streaming, and social media provide: a sense of control and agency, interest-led engagement, reduced demand, connection without social performance anxiety, and decompression after high-demand school days.

Removing or restricting this without addressing the underlying need does not improve regulation — it removes a coping mechanism, often leading to increased meltdowns and distress.

## When Is Screen Use a Genuine Concern?

- The teenager is not sleeping — screens are replacing all sleep
- They are unable to do any other activity at all over an extended period
- There are signs of exposure to genuinely harmful content
- The screen use appears to be driven by panic or dissociation rather than enjoyment
- They are distressed by their own screen use and want support to change it

## Having Low-Demand Conversations About Screens

### Approach that tends to work

- Acknowledge the value: "I know gaming helps you decompress — I get that."
- Express concerns as your own feelings: "I worry about your sleep. Can we figure something out together?"
- Involve them in problem-solving: "What would work for both of us?"
- Accept compromise: an agreed-upon approach, however imperfect, beats a power struggle

### Approaches that don't work

Sudden removal of devices. Time limits enforced without negotiation. Using screens as reward/consequence. Long lectures about screen harm. Monitoring without consent.



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## **The bigger picture**

For a PDA teenager who has few reliable sources of regulation, connection, and joy — screens may be one of the most important things in their life. Working with this reality rather than against it is the most effective long-term approach.