

Families First

a newsletter for Nebraska Families

March/April 2026

N F A P A

EMOTIONAL GOODBYES: HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN COPE WHEN IT'S TIME TO SEPARATE

Written by: Beth Tyson

I was recently chatting with a client who needed help coping with the often intense emotions of her toddler when she said, "I started sneaking out just to go to the grocery store because she gets so upset when I leave."

It dawned on me that I've heard some version of this in many families. Such as:

"We didn't tell her we were going out to dinner because she'd get upset."

"He cries every time I say goodbye, so I just leave while he's napping."

In relation to foster and kinship care, it's something like: "It's better if we don't mention Mom/Dad anymore because it will only stir things up."

Why Goodbyes are SO Difficult

When I became a mom, I had these thoughts too. I remember a hot summer day standing at the door, shoes in hand to go for a walk (something I needed), heart racing, knowing my daughter would cry if she saw me leave. Every instinct said, "Just sneak out. Spare her (and yourself) the pain."

Luckily, in that moment (and many after that), I recognized the only one it was easier for was ME.

Saying goodbye meant watching her struggle, feeling her fear of abandonment, and sitting in the discomfort of knowing I couldn't take it away. But because of my training in trauma-

informed care, I realized disappearing only left her in her micro-grief alone and silenced.

Through deeper reflection, I also noticed that her reaction to my leaving was activating old pain in me that I wanted to avoid. That's a trauma response while parenting, a.k.a. becoming "triggered" (not my favorite word for it).

Even the best of parents will feel this depending on their childhood experiences with their own family. Yet, since we are adults now, it's our responsibility to know better and do better for children.

You're Not Really Sneaking Out Anyway – The Impact on Children

The thing is, children notice when we're gone, whether we say goodbye or not. Their bodies sense it even if their minds can't make sense of it.

When adults leave without explanation, the child's nervous system, depending on its life experiences, could fill in the blanks with:

I must've done something wrong.

Maybe they won't come back.

I am leavable. I am unloved.

This happens not only in everyday moments, but in foster and kinship care too:

When a parent stops visiting and adults say, "Let's not



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Nebraska Foster & Adoptive Parent Association
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Attention Foster Parents!

Earn Your In-Service Hours While Getting the Chance to Win a Great Prize!

Answer these 10 questions correctly and you will not only earn .5 credits toward your in-service hours, but your name will also be put in a drawing for a prize. For this issue we are offering a \$10 Walmart gift card.

There are a variety of ways to do this. You can email the information to Felicia@nfapa.org, send the questionnaire to the NFAPA office at 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D, Lincoln, NE 68521 or you can complete the questionnaire online at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NFAPA_March-April_2026 We will then enter your name in the drawing! We will also send you a certificate for training credit to turn in when it is time for relicensing. Good Luck!



1. True or False. People with an optimistic mindset are more resilient and are more likely to rise to a challenge because they believe that they have the power to learn, grow and change.
2. Mark all that apply. How can you help your child notice the good things in daily life?
 - Reinforce and notice your child’s strengths and passions.
 - Use positive parenting techniques to respond instead of reacting.
 - Start a kindness jar and catch your child being kind.
 - Start a daily Positive Affirmation and Gratitude Practice to help replace negative thoughts with positive self-talk.
3. True or False. Children need adults who can stay warm and steady while they ride out their big feelings.
4. Fill in the Blanks. Asking for help is not a sign of _____. It is a sign of _____.
5. True or False. Gaming limits conversations and imagination when playing with friends outside the game.
6. List 3 things that caregivers can do to help with burnout.
7. Fill in the blanks. Goodbyes are never _____, especially when you love a child who has already known loss. But every _____, gentle farewell becomes an opportunity to rewrite their story about love and safety.
8. True or False. According to the Danish Video Game Screen Time Guideline children ages 0-2 years of age can have unlimited screen time.
9. Fill in the Blanks. _____ matters. _____ routines at home and school reduce uncertainty and give the brain a sense of _____.
10. True or False. Teens with ADHD are frequently labeled as “lazy”, “careless”, or “irresponsible”.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

(Continued from page 1)

mention Mom anymore, it will be easier this way.”

Silence teaches children it's not safe to talk about what hurts, and that love disappears without warning. It becomes acceptable not to ask questions.

How to Say Goodbye (For Now) with Honesty

Instead of avoiding the hard moments, let's provide the truth, even to infants and babies who can't talk yet. They can pick up on cues of safety and comfort in our voice and body language.

SAY SOFTLY,

“I am not leaving because of you, and I promise I will be back soon. If something makes me late, someone will let you know.”

“Mom is not able to visit right now, but she still loves you.”

“I'm going out for dinner, and you'll stay with Grandma until I'm back.”

“It's okay to feel sad when I leave. I felt that way too when I was your age. I know this isn't easy for you, but I will be back. Do you want to scribble out your feelings about it? Grandma has some crayons to choose from.”

How to Hold Their Intense Feelings About Goodbye

Then, we have to sit with their emotions. No matter how big they are. Just observe and provide our caring presence. We don't have to fix it or take away their sadness. Just feel it with them, and then tie our shoes and go for that walk we need.

From this, young children learn that adults have to take care of themselves too, which is a model for how they can take breaks from parenting if/when they need to.

These simple truths help children's brains organize their world and rebuild trust one goodbye at a time, even if they are too young to speak.

“Children deserve the truth more than adults deserve ease.”
– Beth Tyson

Prepare them ahead of time. Let the child know when you'll be leaving and when you'll return in simple, concrete terms (e.g., “After snack time, I'll go to my meeting, and Grandma will stay with you until bedtime.”). Predictability calms the nervous system.

Name what's happening and validate feelings. “It's hard when I leave. You might feel sad or mad, and that's okay. I'll miss you too.” This builds emotional literacy and trust.

Create a short goodbye ritual. A special handshake, a hug, or saying a certain phrase (“See you after story time!”) gives the child a consistent cue that you always come back.

Avoid sneaking out. Leaving without notice might stop the tears in the moment, but increases anxiety and hypervigilance later. Children need to see you leave and return to build trust.

Keep your body calm and voice steady, but be authentic. If you are sad, be sad. Your nervous system sets the tone. Even if they're upset, your calm sadness signals safety: “My caregiver

is steady. I can be safe even when I'm sad.”

Offer a transitional object. A photo, small toy, or something that smells like you can help them feel connected when you're apart.

Follow through on your promise. Come back when you said you would. Repetition of this experience rewires the brain for trust and safety.

Reunite with warmth. When you return, offer connection before correction. “I missed you. I'm so happy to see you.” helps close the loop and reinforces that separations end in reunion.

For Children with Trauma Histories:

Use visual aids (timers, calendars, pictures) to show the sequence of leaving and returning.

Expect dysregulation. Clinginess or anger is often a stress response, not “bad behavior.”

Connect and empathize with their emotions. Do you remember what it felt like to say goodbye to a caregiver, even for 30 min., as a child? Bring that emotion to mind and set realistic expectations for the child.

Goodbyes are never easy, especially when you love a child who's already known loss. But every honest, gentle farewell becomes an opportunity to rewrite their story about love and safety.

Each time we prepare them, name their feelings, and come back when we say we will, we help their nervous system learn: people can leave and still return. That lesson might seem small, but it's one of the most powerful gifts we can give.

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https://bethtyson.com/2025/11/03/helping-young-children-cope-when-its-time-to-separate/?fbclid=IwRIRTSAPWXgdleHRuA2F1bQIxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZAo2NjI4NTY4Mzc5AAEecMpZVdQKyhvLT1gUR92_VS0CyBDX29oXfJypSomNj8sl0tnCc2vws39ad8k_aem_hFx8cNCI6POyuF4jpy-t1Q

5 TIPS WHEN YOUR CHILD IS TOO HARD ON THEMSELVES: HANDLING NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

BY ASHLEY SODERLUND PH.D.

Inside: Children naturally develop more self-judgment with age. In our society's hyper-focus on achievement, negative self-talk can lead to anxiety and depression. Help your child develop a healthy attributional style that will help them face challenges.

Between the ages of 6 to 8 children develop the ability to self-monitor and start comparing their abilities to their peers (source).

With this new cognitive ability comes self-judgment and self-doubt. Even the child who had the sunniest personality in preschool may start to show dips in self-esteem as they see themselves in a different light and become more self-critical.

The egocentric confidence of the early years is replaced with a new, more critical inner-voice. This can be especially problematic in our society with its hyper-focus on achievement.

As a parent, it can be heart-wrenching when our child says negative things about themselves and is too hard on themselves. How are you supposed to respond when your child says negative statements like these?

I can't.

I'm stupid.

I'm the worst ever.

I hate this.

I'm terrible at _____.

This is the worst day ever!

I'm the worst kid in the world!

How do we help our kids learn to overcome instead of overblowing or worse, undermining their own self-esteem?

5 Tips to Go From Negative Self-Talk to A Healthy Attributional Style

1. Empathize With Their Struggle: Don't Dismiss Their Feelings

We all have bad days and whether our kids realize it or not it's pretty normal for them to feel this way — especially with their newfound ability to compare themselves to others.

This quote from Rebecca Eanes always comes into my head when I feel annoyed with my son's bad day or bad moments:

"So often, children are punished for being human. They are not allowed to have grumpy moods, bad days, disrespectful tones, or bad attitudes. Yet, we adults have them all the time. None of us are perfect. We must stop holding our children to a higher standard of perfection than we can attain ourselves."

We are quick to say — ***"No you are not"*** when our child says, ***"I'm stupid!"*** We don't like to hear our kids say things like that about themselves, so we dismiss them. That can also dismiss their very real feelings.

Instead, be curious. Ask your child why they feel that way. You can say something like:

- ***"I believe that you have some feelings about this math homework right now and something feels hard to you. Why do you say that you are stupid?"***

Acknowledge their pain, their hurt, their stress, and their struggle. And then normalize it.

2. Normalize "Bad Days" and Self-Doubt

A child's ability to understand another person's perspective is still developing — they have newfound self-comparison abilities, but they still have a certain amount of ego-centrism due to simply not having enough experiences yet.



Often children think they are the only one to feel nervous about the first day of school, the only one who thinks the math homework is hard, and the only one who stubbed their toe and spilt the milk.

Have you ever told your child about a time when you had a hard time and they look at you with big eyes and disbelief?

Help your child broaden their perspective to realize that they are not the only ones to feel this way, that other kids and even adults have discouraging thoughts from time to time.

Normalizing the fact that everyone experiences doubt from time to time can stem the snowball effect of negative thinking.

Be careful that by normalizing you aren't being dismissive of their feelings. Sharing a story of a time you felt something similar will let them know that ***they're not alone and their feelings are valid.***

3. Model Optimistic Thinking and Growth Mindset

How we explain events or actions is called attributional style in psychology. People have a tendency to have an optimistic or pessimistic attributional style.

- The tendency to explain challenges or difficult things as ***internal/personal*** (I do not have a talent for sports), ***pervasive*** (I am bad at all sports), and ***permanent*** (I always lose games) is related to a ***pessimistic attributional style.***
- In contrast, the tendency to explain challenges or difficult things as ***external*** (that was a really hard soccer game), ***specific*** (I'm disappointed I missed one goal at today's game), and ***temporary*** (I'll do better at the next game) is related to an ***optimistic explanatory style.***

People with an optimistic mindset are more resilient and

are more likely to rise to a challenge because they believe that they have the power to learn, grow, and change — a growth mindset.

Notice that I am not advocating a sunny-optimistic viewpoint no matter what— rather, it's healthy to help children adopt a *realistic optimistic* outlook.

Growth Mindset Phrases For Parents

- You can't do that yet. Someday you will (temporary).
- You missed one goal. But you also passed the ball to a teammate and he scored (specific).
- You made a mistake. You are a kind person. You will remember next time (external).
- You can change that choice. Let's have a do-over (temporary).
- It was disappointing to miss that one goal. Sometimes we have disappointing moments and that can feel hard. Everyone feels disappointed in themselves sometimes (specific, temporary, external).

4. Counterbalance the Brain's Negativity

It is actually quite normal for humans to look for negative explanations for things that happen to them.

This is because our brains are designed to protect us and focus on our survival. *Our brains instinctively pay attention to things that make us feel stressed or upset* — anything that could be a possible threat.

Being aware of this tendency to focus on the bad can help us teach our children optimistic explanatory styles of thinking and counterbalance the brain's negativity bias.

This goes for us as parents too, we tend to focus on what our children are not doing well instead of seeing their strengths. This is negativity bias at play!

Good behavior passes by unnoticed, but bad behavior disrupts our life and our brain hones in on it.

This is why things like mindful parenting even exist... so we can switch from automatically reacting to our kids (to our life!) and be more mindful and conscious in how we respond.

How to Help Your Child Cultivate a Realistic Positive Outlook:

- Help your child notice the good things in daily life and notice how your kids can do this for you as well — our kids often notice little things we adults are quick to brush past — a flower, a sunset, a butterfly.
- Reinforce and notice your child's strengths and passions.
- Use positive parenting techniques to respond instead of reacting to your kids.
- Start a Kindness jar and catch your child being kind. Place a marble in a jar each time you notice their kindness.
- *Start a daily Positive Affirmation and Gratitude practice with your child* to help replace negative thoughts with positive self-talk that is focused on helping your child discover who they are and what they really care about.

5. Be Genuine and Specific When Your Praise

Telling your child — *"You are so smart!"* backfires because encourages a personal and permanent attributional style — a pessimistic attributional style.

When your child does face a challenge and the math homework doesn't come easy they will think they are not smart at math and that is something they can't change. Instead, they will have the tendency to think, "I'm stupid!"

Instead, be very specific when you praise — something like "Wow, I like how many colors you used in that painting" is very different than, "You are a great artist!"

Acknowledge your child's effort. Praise them for the hard work they have done and ask them what the next steps are.

This growth mindset type of praise is the kind that builds self-esteem.

The one exception to this rule is telling your child they are good and kind — because they are and they will believe you. Telling your child that they are kind, good, true, brave, and strong will enhance those qualities in her and help her internalize those qualities.

Research shows that praising children in a "fixed" way on prosocial behaviors, for example, saying things like — "You are a good friend," "You are kind," and "You are a good helper" helps to strengthen those behaviors in children.

When we tell our children that they are GOOD and at the same time teach them how to change their behavior, we are giving them the gift of an *optimistic frame of mind*: attributing good things as personal and permanent and negative things as temporary and impersonal.

Negative self-talk is part of life and partly due to how our brain works. Teaching kids how to handle their feelings of failure and defeat will teach them to *overcome and persevere*.

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HOW TO BUILD SELF-CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ADHD TEEN

Help them believe in themselves by empowering them with a “Can Do” Attitude

Written By: Marybeth Bock

If you're the parent of a teen with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), you know all too well the unique challenges and daily frustrations both you and your child face every single day.

Are you constantly trying to help them stay on task with their homework?

Do you feel like they're always interrupting you and not listening to you when you talk to them?

Do you feel like you're constantly repeating yourself?

Are you tired of them always losing their homework, phone, or wallet?

You're not alone... sometimes, just getting a grip on the most mundane tasks can be an immense challenge.

How to Build Self-Confidence in Your ADHD Teen

These challenges can occur whether your teen has been clinically diagnosed with ADHD, or if they just exhibit some of the common characteristics of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

According to a 2024 report from the National Center for Health Statistics, approximately 11% of children and teenagers between the ages of 5 and 17 have been diagnosed with ADHD, with the prevalence even higher in kids between the ages of 12 and 17.

What many parents may not realize is that ADHD symptoms can morph and change over time as their child ages. The National Institute for Mental Health says, “In young children with ADHD, hyperactivity-impulsivity is the most predominant symptom. However, during kids’ teen years, hyperactivity seems to lessen, and symptoms may change to include feelings of restlessness or fidgeting, but inattention and impulsivity may remain. Also, many teens with ADHD struggle with relationships and antisocial behaviors.”

Is it any wonder that so many teens with ADHD struggle with self-confidence?

Here are some of the key factors that contribute to low self-confidence in teens with ADHD, even for those who take medication and/or receive therapy.

1. Academic Challenges

ADHD can affect a teen's ability to process information, leading to frustration and feelings of being less capable than their friends and fellow students. You might find your teen is struggling with attention, organization, and time management,

which can lead to poor grades. Ongoing difficulties in school, such as low grades or negative feedback from teachers, can damage their self-esteem, especially after years of being called out or reprimanded.

2. Social Difficulties

Having ADHD makes it harder for teens to pick up on social cues, control impulsive talking and behavior, and maintain attention during conversations.

These communication struggles can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, or even social rejection, which can be painful and damaging to a teenager's self-confidence, especially when fitting in and being accepted is so important to teens.

3. Negative Feedback

Teens with ADHD are frequently labeled as “lazy,” “careless,” or “irresponsible,” (especially undiagnosed teens). Sadly, they can internalize these labels, leading to a reduced sense of self-worth. Also, teens who are criticized by teachers, coaches, friends, and even parents, (even if it's well-intentioned), can erode their self-esteem over time, and trigger feelings of anger that are often directed at us – their parents.

4. Emotional Regulation

While all teens can be overly emotional at times, those with ADHD often suffer from an increased level of emotional sensitivity, meaning that they may experience even more intense emotional reactions. Frequent feelings of frustration, anger, or sadness can impact self-confidence, especially if they feel they can't control their own emotions.

5. Comparison to Friends

Like being a teenager isn't hard enough! It's natural for teens with ADHD to compare themselves to their friends, mainly those who don't face the same challenges. Watching others succeed in areas where they struggle, such as in school or social situations, can make them feel inferior. The pressure can be overwhelming and it's brutal to deal with a teen who might be repeatedly calling themselves a “loser.”

6. Daily Challenges

ADHD can make managing daily life, like keeping track of personal items, following schedules, or completing chores, much more difficult. Struggling with simple tasks can make teens feel overwhelmed and incompetent. All this constant “daily management” stress oftentimes leads to feelings of being always behind or inadequate.

7. ADHD Stigma

It's sad but true that many people often view ADHD as a “deficit” rather than recognizing the unique strengths and qualities of individuals who have it. This negative perception can lead teenagers to feel that there is something inherently wrong with them that they need to hide from others. They often feel shame for being different.

So how can you help boost self-esteem in your



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05/09/26 (Saturday) Fremont 11-3
05/14/26 (Thursday) Winnebago 3-7
05/16/26 (Saturday) Norfolk 11-3
05/28/26 (Thursday) Lincoln 3-7

06/11/26 (Thursday) Winnebago 11-2
06/12/26 (Friday) North Platte 3-7
06/13/26 (Saturday) Kearney 9-1
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ADHD teenager?

1. Celebrate Their Strengths

Help your teen focus on their strengths and talents.

Many people with ADHD are highly creative and intelligent and can hyperfocus on tasks that interest them, which can really play in their favor. Playing sports can be great for teens with high energy levels. Encourage your teen to look for and pursue activities where they excel. That “can do” attitude can transfer over to other areas of their life!

2. Focus on Positive Reinforcement

Offer your teen regular positive feedback and reinforcement for their efforts, progress, and achievements, no matter how small they might be. It’s important to counteract the negative messages they might receive from others and the negative thoughts they likely have swirling around in their head.

3. Encourage a Growth Mindset

Help your ADHD teen to understand that their challenges are opportunities for growth, and that making mistakes is simply a natural part of learning. When they embrace a growth mindset, they’ll be kinder to themselves and accept that their efforts may take longer to succeed – but they can overcome almost any challenge with time and commitment.

4. Foster Independence and Self-Advocacy

Allow your teen to take on responsibilities and make decisions for themselves, which can build confidence in their ability to manage their own lives.

It can be tough to do and might take some time but allow your ADHD teen to advocate for their own needs, whether in school, social settings, with doctors, or at home. This will empower them and help them get comfortable taking control of their life (and unique challenges) before they head off to college or begin a career.

5. Reach Out for Support, If Needed

In addition to the decision to medicate your teen or not, consider therapy or counseling to help them develop coping strategies, improve self-esteem, and address any underlying emotional issues. It’s important to be mindful that teens with ADHD are more likely to experience depression, so if you suspect your teen is also feeling depressed, finding professional support can be very helpful.

As a parent of an ADHD teen, I found it very helpful to also seek out stress management techniques that can help increase my own patience and ability to deal with frustration. That way, I’m better equipped to respond calmly to my child’s behavior.

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LITTLE BRAINS, BIG FEELINGS: HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE ANXIETY

Written By: Tania Johnson

Anxiety can feel enormous to a child. Their heart races, their stomach hurts, and their mind fills with worries that will not go away. Often, anxiety shows up as behavior—clinginess, meltdowns, irritability, or refusal to try new things. For parents, this can feel confusing and frustrating.

The good news is that when children understand what anxiety is and have the right support, they can learn to manage it with courage and confidence.

Teaching Kids About Anxiety Through Child-Friendly Neuroscience

Explaining anxiety through child-friendly neuroscience helps take away shame. The brain has an alarm system called the amygdala. When it thinks there might be danger, it sets off an alarm that tells the body to fight, flee, or freeze. This can be helpful if a real danger is present.

But sometimes the alarm gets a little too sensitive. It might go off for things that are not truly dangerous, like walking into a classroom or trying something new.

Helping Children Recognize False Alarms in the Brain

Children often believe that if they feel scared, it must mean they are in danger. Helping them understand that their brain is sending a false alarm can be powerful. A parent might say, “Your brain is trying to protect you, but it is getting a little mixed up. We can help it calm down together.”

This teaches children that their feelings are real, but not always accurate.

The Role of Co-Regulation in Calming Anxiety

Managing anxiety starts with regulation. Children need adults who can stay warm and steady while they ride out their big feelings. Simple co-regulation strategies—deep breaths together, gentle grounding exercises, or offering a calming touch—show children that they are not alone.

Over time, they begin to internalize these skills and use them on their own.

Encouraging Bravery and Confidence in Anxious Children

It is also important to encourage bravery. Many children believe they must feel completely calm before facing something hard. Teaching them that bravery means being scared and doing it anyway helps them reframe their experiences.

Parents can gently coach children to take small steps toward the things that frighten them, celebrating each effort along the way.

Creating Predictable Routines to Reduce Anxiety

Consistency matters. Predictable routines at home and school reduce uncertainty and give the brain a sense of safety. Clear expectations, consistent rhythms, and meaningful rituals all help children feel grounded.

With support, children come to see themselves not as powerless in the face of anxiety, but as capable of meeting challenges with courage.

Helping Children Build Lifelong Resilience

Little brains hold very big feelings, but with warmth, presence, and tools for regulation, children learn that anxiety does not have to control them. Instead, it can become a teacher—one that helps them practice bravery, find their inner strength, and discover their own resilience.

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GAMING FATIGUE AND EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION: WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

Gaming and screen time

Gaming, or playing video games, is popular among many children and teens. Sometimes so much so that it can be hard to get them to do anything else. Discussions about when to play video games or for how long are probably not uncommon if your child loves gaming.

Kids play these games on computers, gaming consoles, iPads, or phones. They can range from simple and fun solitaire puzzles to complex strategy games with multiple players. For many children, as they get older, gaming becomes a hobby and an interest beyond just playing the game.

Gaming can be a significant part of kids’ social lives and the center of their interaction with friends, not just on the screen, but outside the game as well, providing inspiration for play and conversations.

With gaming becoming an all-consuming interest and social activity, managing gaming time for kids can be an ongoing struggle, and parents often wonder how much video game time is healthy.

Setting rules around video game time limits by age is advised to ensure we follow screen time guidelines that suit our child’s developmental stage and needs. Even though we make sure that what’s on the screen is educational and child-friendly, spending time in front of the screen can rob children of valuable real-life interactions and activities.

Especially young children depend on exploring and understanding the world through their senses in first-hand interactions with their surroundings, not through screens. They need to interact with their caregivers to help them process their impressions and to regulate their emotions and reactions to what they experience.

For this reason, it is not advised that children under the age of two spend any time on screens at all, and that screen time is increased gradually as the child matures.

Video game time limits by age

These are recommendations for video game time limits by age based on research and official Danish Video Game Screen Time Guidelines for children during their free time:

- **0-2 years:** No screen time or games are recommended for this age group.
- **2-4 years:** Maximum one hour of screen time, including other screen activities besides games, and always with an adult nearby. Make sure you pick the games for your child to ensure they’re child-friendly, slow-paced, and commercial-free.

- **5-17 years:** 1-2 hours, depending on age and activity. Get to know the game your child is playing. This way, you can better assess how to set suitable screen time limits and know what to be aware of when your child is on the screen, including the appropriate safety measures for their age.

Games can be fun, social, educational, and worth the time spent on screens. However, the concern around gaming stems, rightfully so, from the fact that many children spend too much time on screens, which can affect many areas of their lives negatively. No matter how good and beneficial a game is, the issue with excess screen time is that children are not doing anything else when they're on screens.

We must be mindful of creating a balanced life for our kids and check in with ourselves to understand what that balance looks like for our child. The key is to balance the quality, benefits, and purpose of the game with valuable physical activities and relationships outside the game, so our kids can enjoy their hobby healthily.

Gaming is more than just screen time

Setting guidelines around gaming is much more than limiting screen time. When we have a child at home who loves gaming, we must make an effort to understand the games they play. First of all, to assess if they are suitable for our child, but also to understand what's great about our child's favorite game and how it's played.

This way, we are better equipped to have meaningful conversations with our kids about their favorite online activity.

When parents think of gaming, they might think of kids sitting alone and passively in front of a screen, engaged in repetitive, meaningless activities that might have an element of violence, and in the long run, will be harmful.

In reality, depending on the game, gaming can be much more dynamic and multifaceted. Children aren't just playing games – they are often engaging with a world that offers a variety of learning and social opportunities, and it doesn't have to be violent at all. There can be many positive effects of gaming on children, too.

Gaming doesn't have to be a solitary activity, either. Many games are played with friends, in teams, one-on-one in a competition, or sitting next to each other, taking turns, sharing a screen. Gaming can provide a space for kids to bond and nurture their friendships, even if they're not playing directly together or even being physically next to each other.

In addition, the story of the game often fuels conversations or imagination when playing with friends outside the game. Many young gamers also watch tutorials or recordings of other gamers' gameplay to learn about their favorite games, follow popular gamers, or improve their skills as an extension of their gaming experience.

Gaming can be a platform for developing strategic thinking and teamwork. Often, games require players to think critically, solve problems, and work with others to achieve shared goals.

Whether they're strategizing in real-time or collaborating with a team, gaming can help children hone important cognitive and social skills.

Additionally, some games have been developed for a specific educational purpose, which is why you can also find educational video games for children, created to help kids who benefit from alternative ways of learning. Cognitive development and video games don't have to work against each other. When choosing the right games within a healthy framework, there can be many benefits of gaming for kids.

To KNOW and not just say NO

Screen time discussions are often rooted in a concern for children's health and well-being. Parents and experts worry about the potential consequences of excessive screen use – how it will impact concentration, sleep, physical activity, and overall development.

However, as our kids get older, and we might not be aware of every single game they are playing, it's important to recognize that the issue of screen time also has a lot to do with what's on the screen and not just the amount of time.

Gaming is often labeled as unproductive or even harmful, and can be if our kids get their hands on the wrong games, but often it is not. There can be much more to this activity than we think. If we look a bit closer, harmful content and inactive hours in front of a screen are not always the case.

It's easy for us to fall into the trap of simply saying "no" or cutting screen time short, thinking that gaming is bad for our kids and less is better, without fully understanding what's happening on the screen.

Setting limits on screen time should come from a place of knowledge, not fear. We shouldn't disregard our concerns about gaming, but we should be aware of the nuances and look closer at what our child is into, not just assume that it is bad for them.

Understanding children's gaming interests

Before we decide how much time your child can spend on gaming, we need to understand what's happening on the screen, the content, the purpose of the game, and how a specific game affects our child.

Additionally, the quality of the games available for kids varies greatly, so it is important to pay attention to what they are doing on the screen and if it's beneficial or even harmful. We must find a way to stay engaged with our kids' online activities even when they grow older, for example, by having regular open discussions about the games they play.

Not all games that our kids play are good for even a minimum amount of time, while other games might need more time for the players to plan with their team, carry out their mission, or see the results of their focused, complex work.

This is why it is a good idea to get to know the game and to discuss screen time limits with children, to know what works for the specific game your child is playing. Talking to kids about screen time includes learning about their favorite game

to assess the quality of the game ourselves and understand the important aspects of the game.

Some games have short, intense levels, while others are slower, multiplayer games played with friends revolving around time-consuming strategic planning and cooperation to carry out a mission. Understanding the game is the first step to setting screen time limits that will last and make sense to our kids.

Checklist on what to KNOW when setting rules around screen time

Age-appropriate screen time

Check screen time recommendations for your child's age and assess the boundaries and framework needed to ensure a balanced life with time for other activities.

Get to know the game

Try the game or watch your child play. Assess the quality of the game and consider whether it is appropriate for our child's age and maturity level, and if there are any associated risks or safety issues to consider. Check in to understand what your child loves about the game. This is the best basis for meaningful discussions around future screen time rules.

Adjust screen time rules and frequency to the specific game

Are there team commitments, conversations, battles, or levels to complete that should be considered when agreeing on screen time rules? Some games are okay to play for a short time daily, while others might need longer screen time on specific days only.

Some games can easily be completed within a fixed time, while others might need a more flexible buffer zone to wrap up battles, missions, or other team commitments.

Independence or support in managing screen time

Agree on realistic rules around managing screen time. Acknowledge that leaving a game can be difficult, even for adults. Check in with your child about how much support they need in managing screen time themselves, and in what way they will need help keeping track.

Post-game pickups

Be aware that there can be conflicts, conversations, or big accomplishments needing extra attention after screen time ends. Like any other social interaction or sport, kids need us to check in and hear how it went. Don't end every game with a conflict or complaint around the time spent online; instead, show an interest in how the game went, just like you would if they came home from a football match. Leaving the game, excited to share their experience with you, can be a game-changer in your screen time issues.

Be aware of offline issues

If a child is particularly drawn to the virtual world, assess whether there's a healthy balance between their online and

real-life relationships. Your child may need your help solving problems outside the game. At times, online life and screens can become an escape from boredom, loneliness, or other issues.

Finding balance in the real and virtual worlds

It's crucial to make sure your child is able to balance their online and offline lives. Gaming can be a positive outlet. However, it's important to ensure that it's not being used as an escape from real-life challenges or something they turn to simply because they don't know what else to do.

Encouraging offline activities for kids can be necessary if they don't actively seek them out. We have to make sure there is still time for physical activity and spending time with family and friends.

Some kids might also need to be reminded that there are other activities for entertainment than screens. Friends can get stuck in the habit of only playing video games and forgetting what else to do together. For this reason, we sometimes have to encourage our kids to spend time with friends offline, too.

If your child is heavily drawn to the virtual world, take time to examine their real-life relationships and activities, and check if they are maintaining friendships and interests outside of gaming. Some kids can use gaming to avoid dealing with issues in school, friendships, or family life. If so, it's better to focus on those underlying problems and work towards solutions offline.

Concerns around screen time should not only be focused on the amount of time spent gaming, but also on why a child is drawn to it in the first place. A healthy balance between virtual and real-life activities is key to a child's well-being.

What helping kids find balance looks like:

- Providing fun screen time alternatives for children to prevent them from choosing screens simply out of

Kits for Kids

NFAPA is wrapping up their "Kits for Kids" program, and we have a wonderful selection of items still available for foster parents! If you're in the Lincoln area, we invite you to come by and pick up essentials like cozy blankets, backpacks, stuffed animals, shampoo, and school supplies. Please reach out to our office to schedule a convenient time to collect as many items as you need. Remember, all items must be picked up by April 15th.

NFAPA Office: 402-476-2273.

We can't wait to help

boredom

- Joining them in playing their favorite game to combine quality time and show an interest in what they love to do.
- Balancing screen time and physical activity off the screen to keep the body strong and healthy
- Promoting healthy screen habits by being a role model and leading by example
- Monitoring and reducing screen time for better sleep, time with friends and family, and other activities when needed
- Making sure there is a balance between your child's online and real-life friendships



How to solve the challenges around screen time

Conflicts and screen time rules around gaming, unfortunately, go hand in hand in many families. Some parents take on the fight while others give up; either way, something needs to change to make sure healthy habits and a peaceful family life aren't lost in the struggles.

There can be many reasons for constant disagreements and issues around screen time. Finding out what triggers the conflicts can be a great start to solving them. The best way to find out is to find a peaceful moment to check in with your child and understand their perspective.

Often, without wanting it, we might have contributed to the conflicts by letting a situation get out of hand and not intervening sooner. Part of our frustrations with the excessive time spent in front of screens can then be with ourselves, for not handling the situation better.

We can still turn it around. We just have to be mindful of not projecting this frustration onto our kids, blaming them for our bad choices. In the end, managing screen time around games is too big a responsibility for many kids to handle on their own.

When addressing screen time issues with our kids and

supporting new habits, we have to be mindful not to bring our frustration with ourselves into the situation to fuel a potential conflict.

When looking for solutions for excessive screen time in kids' daily life, here are a few aspects of gaming screen time challenges to consider.

1. Are the rules fair?

Unlike some video games, many online games can't be paused or stopped without serious consequences for the team. Games like Fortnite or Counter-Strike are often played in real-time, with live teammates and opponents. Asking your child to turn off the game in the middle of a match or 10 minutes before the end will most likely cause frustration or lead to conflicts.

Other games consist of complex levels that take hard work and concentration to complete. Being forced to leave the game minutes before the end of a level that you worked hard to reach can easily be the reason for conflict.

Children value fairness and respect, and cutting off a game without warning can feel disrespectful to their commitment and their relationships with other players. It can be compared to being called home from an important football game 10 minutes before the end. To some kids, it can feel like their hobby is not valued or understood by their parents, which can lead to further distance and a lack of responsiveness to rules or unwillingness to cooperate.

If you frequently experience big conflicts over gaming time, be curious and talk with your child to find the reason. They may feel that their gaming time isn't respected or that you don't understand the nature of their games. In that case, you can change your approach to work together towards an agreement on a better routine for ending a game.

2. Stimulating games that retain the attention

Games are often purposely designed to be overly stimulating and retain the player as long as possible. Other kids are simply naturally more drawn to games and can find it very hard to turn off the screen by themselves.

If you sense that your child has this issue, setting clear boundaries and helping them when it's time to turn off the game can be necessary. Make sure you help your child pick out games that are better for them as well. Identify the difficult part in letting go of the game, and agree on how you can help them in this process to make the transition easier.

Acknowledge that it is hard, and accept that it might never be easy for them. However, taking off the blame and criticism for their mistakes and struggles with turning off the screen can help the motivation, as well as agreeing on consequences or 'rewards' for succeeding.

3. Burnout

Strong reactions after being asked to stop video games can simply be the result of too much time on the screen. Spending long hours in front of the screen, especially after playing highly

stimulating games, can be hard for the brain to transition from. A lack of fresh air, exercise, sleep, social activities, and maybe not eating or drinking enough doesn't help.

The mind and body might not be in the best condition to handle frustration, and this can easily lead to conflict. If this seems to be your issue, your child needs you to step in and help them regulate their screen time. It could also be that it is necessary to pick out better games if you find that the games they play are too stimulating and stressful.

4. Gaming as an escape or addiction

Alternatively, some kids may be using gaming to cope with difficulties in life. In case of video game addiction, kids can disappear into the gaming world as a way to cope with difficult emotions and situations offline.

If you suspect your child is showing signs of video game addiction, then you need to reach out to your healthcare provider for professional help and evaluation. Open conversations about their feelings and challenges in school or at home can help avoid using video games as a coping mechanism in difficult situations.

5. Lacking offline friends and activities

Kids crave friendships and valuable connections. Some kids might seek those out online to the extent that they have stronger ties to the gaming community than in real life. If this is the case, they will naturally want to spend as much time online as possible.

Make sure to help your child build friendships offline, too, and work out how to solve the issue with loneliness outside the game. Some kids benefit from seeking out physical communities formed around a gaming hobby, as a way to enjoy their gaming interests in an offline setting and meet friends outside the game. And remember to nourish offline activities, too. Have a list of fun things to do together, and carve out time to cultivate offline hobbies and interests.

6. Projecting our frustration onto our kids

Sometimes parents contribute to creating unhealthy screen time habits for their children. Often, we allowed a bit more time on the screens than we would have liked simply to keep our child occupied and entertained, leading us to be frustrated and blaming ourselves.

Bringing this frustration into screen time conflict and blaming our kids for our mistakes will only fuel the fire. Acknowledging our part in unhealthy habits and focusing on looking ahead, instead of taking our frustration out on our kids, will make any screen time discussion easier.

Setting screen time rules together

The best approach for creating family screen time agreements around gaming is to involve your child in setting rules. Talk about what makes sense for the types of games they play. By understanding the game's mechanics, you can create a plan that works for both of you.

For example, you might agree on a set time for playing certain games, or the number of levels to complete for another game. Other games might need more flexible time to finish a match or mission.

Additionally, we must take a holistic view of our child's life to make sure they have time for school, physical activity, family, and socializing, too. Together, we can identify what other parts of their life are important to them besides gaming to keep them happy and healthy, and let them know that it's your job to make sure that screen time doesn't get in the way.

Negotiating screen time limits with children might not be the easiest part of parenting, but these are ways to make it a bit easier. Collaborative screen time rules for families mean involving children in screen time decisions.

Learning about the games they play and listening to their needs will make it more likely that they will be open to listening to you and the reasons behind regulating their time on screens. Conversation and mutual respect are the best foundation for making rules and habits that last, as well as dealing with mistakes and breaches in the future.

A balanced approach to screen time

Sometimes we need to look closer at the games our kids are playing and adopt a more nuanced perspective on this screen activity. Gaming can be a learning experience and also a very social activity.

However, like any hobby, it's important to ensure that it doesn't overshadow other aspects of life and that we find a balanced approach to integrating screen time into daily routines. Getting involved in understanding what children are playing, who they're playing with, and why they enjoy it is key to making informed decisions about balanced screen time for children.

Creating fair and healthy screen time habits for kids includes approaching the issue with knowledge, insight,



communication, and empathy. This is the best foundation for creating a healthy balance between our children's virtual and real worlds that will make sense to them, too.

10 parenting tips for managing screen time

To sum it all up, we put together our best screen time management tips for parents here. Use this list as inspiration for creating a balanced life with gaming for kids.

1. **Get to know the game:** Get to know the games your child is playing. Try to play them yourself or sit next to them to get a feeling of what the game is about and how it's played. Make sure they are age-appropriate, and check if there are any safety or health concerns to consider.
2. **Understand the benefits:** Understand that gaming time can be much more than playing games; sometimes it's practicing social skills, strategic thinking, teamwork, and much more.
3. **Ensure a balanced social life:** Ensure gaming doesn't replace real-life relationships and activities or steal time from other essential daily tasks. Be aware of screen time limits that suit your child's age and development.
4. **Check for other underlying issues:** Learn why your child is drawn to gaming. Sometimes it can be an escape from underlying issues offline, like boredom or loneliness, that they will need help dealing with. If you suspect signs of addiction, seek qualified help from your doctor or healthcare provider.
5. **Create fair screen time rules:** Adjust the screen time rules to fit the game. For example, agree on a number of levels to complete, or incorporate a buffer time for games that need time to wrap up conversations or battles.
6. **Pay attention and be involved:** Show an interest in your child's hobby, for example, by asking how the game went. Sometimes, there are hard-earned victories to celebrate or in-game conflicts between friends or other gamers to resolve. Gaming can be a great way to bond with your child.
7. **Create new habits together:** Discuss screen time with your child. Collaborate with your child to create reasonable limits for everyone in the family. Get your child's input on creating meaningful screen time rules and a balanced daily life. This can help avoid power struggles and ensure both feel heard and understood.

8. Be responsible for your past choices:

Acknowledge your own responsibility in contributing to unhealthy screen time habits for your child to avoid projecting your frustration onto them. Often, parents allow more screen time to avoid conflicts or interruptions, leading to self-blame and frustration. Leave blame and shame out of your screen time discussions and focus on looking ahead to the new habits you want to create.

9. **Support offline activities:** Come up with a list of fun things to do that don't involve screens, so gaming doesn't become the only activity your child can think of. Sometimes kids just need to remember all the fun alternatives. It might take a bit of time, encouragement, and support to get into new habits. Doing activities together helps a lot.

10. **Be a supportive role model:** Be authentic and acknowledge that managing screen time is hard for both kids and adults. Compliment your child when they succeed and support them when it's difficult. Make sure you pave the way for healthy habits by managing your own screen time and online gaming habits, and be open when you find it difficult yourself.

Raise a Digitally Smart Kid—One Conversation at a Time! In today's digital world, guiding your child online can feel overwhelming—but it doesn't have to be. Raising Digital Citizen's Family Conversation Cards make it easy to spark meaningful discussions about online safety, screen time, and responsible tech use. Designed by parenting and digital well-being experts, these cards help you build trust, set clear expectations, and empower your child to navigate the internet with confidence.

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BURNOUT IS NOT JUST A BUZZWORD: UNDERSTANDING THE EMOTIONAL LOAD OF CAREGIVING

Author: Tania Johnson, R. Psych., RPT

Why Caregivers **Everywhere** Are Feeling So

Overwhelmed

Caregivers are carrying more emotional weight than ever before. Parents, grandparents, educators, and all those who care for children tell me they feel tired in a way that sleep does not fix. They describe a heaviness that makes even routine tasks feel harder than they should.

Burnout is often misunderstood. It is not about being weak or unmotivated. It is about a nervous system that has been running on high alert for too long. Caregivers today are expected to be emotionally available, patient, organized, regulated, and deeply responsive. This is beautiful, but it is also demanding.

Understanding the Difference Between Stress and Burnout

Stress is temporary. Everyone experiences it. It shows up during a busy week, a difficult day, or a challenging season. Stress eventually lifts when the demand lessens.

Burnout is different. Burnout happens when the emotional load remains heavy for too long, without enough rest, support, or space to recover. It is chronic, not temporary. It erodes energy, compassion, and resilience. A caregiver might say, "I am trying, but I feel empty."

Invisible Labor: The Hidden Weight Caregivers Carry

Invisible labor is the work that no one sees but everyone relies on. It includes holding the emotional climate of the household, remembering appointments, planning meals, supporting friendships, responding to emotional needs, and tracking school demands. It is the constant monitoring of moods, routines, schedules, and dynamics.

For many caregivers, the list never ends. When the brain carries this much for too long, it enters survival mode. Irritability increases. Motivation decreases. The threshold for stress becomes much lower. This is not failure. It is fatigue.

How Burnout Affects the Nervous System

A burned-out nervous system has difficulty shifting between states. Instead of moving gracefully from activity to rest, it gets stuck. Some caregivers feel constantly activated, like they are bracing for the next demand. Others feel shut down, numb, or disconnected.

Both are signs that the nervous system is asking for support. The body is saying, "I cannot keep going at this pace."

Small, Consistent Practices That Begin the Healing Process

Caregivers often assume they need long stretches of time to rest or recover. But healing begins in tiny, consistent moments. Two minutes of deep breathing can soften the stress response. A slow walk outside can reset the nervous system. A moment of silence in the car can help the body shift out of survival mode.

Support also matters. A single conversation with a friend who listens with warmth can be restorative. Asking for help is

not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of awareness.

Caregiver Well-Being Is Foundational to Child Well-Being

Children rely on the adults around them for co-regulation. When a caregiver is rested, supported, and emotionally available, children feel safer and more secure. A regulated caregiver becomes a steady anchor.

Caring for yourself is not selfish. It is an essential part of caring for your child.

Burnout does not mean you are failing. It means you have been carrying too much for too long, often without acknowledgment. You deserve rest, support, and gentleness. Healing begins with small steps and compassionate awareness.

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NFAPA SUPPORT GROUPS

Foster parenting is hard. You face challenges as you parent children and youth with a trauma history that your friends and family do not understand. Please join us in one of our support groups where you can find mutual support and opportunities to discuss parenting joys, challenges and strategies as you navigate the life of a foster parent.

Faces: Online Foster Parent Support Group Chat on Facebook

- Meets Tuesday nights at 9:00 (CT).
- Contact Robbi at 402-853-1091. You must have a Facebook account.

Parenting Across Color Lines: For multi-racial families

- Fourth Tuesday of the month – for multi-racial families.
- 6:15pm at Connection Point, Lincoln. Pot Luck Supper prior to meeting.
- **RSVP required** – Contact Jessica at: jessica@nfapa.org or Felicia at (402) 476-2273
- Two or more families must register 24 hours prior to support group or it is cancelled.

Central & Western In-Person Support Groups for Relative and Kinship families

- Kearney: First Friday in May and July from 7:00pm-8:30pm (CT) Location TBD.
- Scottsbluff: First Friday in June and August from 7:00-8:30 pm (MT) Location TBD.
- **RSVP required.** Contact Vicki, 308-352-6079 or Vicki@nfapa.org
- Two or more families must register 24 hours prior to support group or it is cancelled.

Virtual Support Group

- Second Thursday of the month. May-August 2026
- 6:30pm-8:00pm (CT)
- **RSVP required.** Contact Vicki, 308-352-6079 or Vicki@nfapa.org

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- Opportunity for all foster families, adoptive families and relative caregivers to be actively involved in an association by serving on committees and/or on the Executive Board
- Working to instigate changes by alertness to legislation affecting the child welfare system
- An advocate on your behalf at local, state and national levels
- 25% of membership dues goes toward an NFAPA Scholarship

Thank you for your support!

Please mail membership form to:
NFAPA, 3601 N. 25th Street, Suite D
Lincoln, NE 68521.

Questions? Please call us at 877-257-0176.

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I am a Foster/Adoptive Parent. I have fostered for _____ years.
(circle one)

I am with _____ agency.

I wish to join the effort:

- Single Family Membership** (a single foster or adoptive parent), \$25
- Family Membership** (married foster or adoptive parents), \$35
- Supporting Membership** (individuals wishing to support our efforts), \$75
- Organization Membership** (organizations wishing to support our efforts), \$150
- Friends of NFAPA**, \$5 billed Monthly

My donation will be acknowledged through Families First newsletters.

- Gold Donation, \$1,000 Silver Donation, \$750
- Platinum Donation, \$500 Bronze Donation, \$250
- Other, \$ _____