

Live Oak Charter School (LOCS) Media & Technology Guidelines

Supporting Healthy Relationships with Technology in a Digital Age

Today's children are growing up in an era of unprecedented access to technology and media. From an early age, they encounter digital devices, online platforms, and a constant flow of information that shapes their understanding of the world. While technology offers valuable tools for learning and connection, it also brings challenges that require mindful guidance. At LOCS, our mission is to nurture the whole child—mind, body, and spirit—in alignment with Waldorf principles. We strive to create an environment where children can experience wonder, creativity, and authentic connection, free from the distractions and developmental impacts often linked to early and excessive media and technology exposure. We encourage our community to embrace a thoughtful approach to technology, cultivating habits that support children's holistic growth, while allowing time and space for deep, imaginative play and meaningful in-person interactions. Through these guidelines, we aim to empower families in navigating this new digital landscape thoughtfully, ensuring that technology enhances—rather than overshadows—our children's development and well-being.

Our Approach to Media and Technology

Research highlights the developmental impacts of habitual electronic media use, especially in early childhood.¹² Frequent screen exposure has been linked to diminished attention span, creativity, and social-emotional skills, as well as disrupted physical health.³ LOCS's guidelines, inspired by our values, are intended to support families in balancing the benefits of technology with the developmental needs of children. We acknowledge that all media and technology are not created equal and that thoughtful and skillful exposure can have much more positive outcomes than unintentional use.⁴

Community Acknowledgement

At LOCS our commitment to our students and community result in having strong recommendations and values around how engage with technology. However we recognize that every family and student is on their own unique journey with media and technology use, shaped by personal values, experiences, and needs. At LOCS, our aim is to meet each family where they are, providing guidance and support to help everyone engage with technology thoughtfully and intentionally, in a way that aligns with our shared community values.

Digital Balance, Hygiene, and Citizenship

As children grow and develop, they gradually acquire the maturity needed to engage with technology in a thoughtful and responsible way. At LOCS, we support this journey by fostering **Digital Balance, Hygiene, and Citizenship** skills across all stages of development. These skills help students navigate technology mindfully, protect their well-being, and interact

¹ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2813443>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22041529/>

³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9923845/>

⁴ https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Video-Games-Youth-091.aspx?WebsiteKey=a2785385-0ccf-4047-b76a-64b4094ae07f

respectfully online, ensuring they are equipped to handle the digital world in a healthy, balanced manner.

1. **Digital Balance:** Teaching students to use technology purposefully helps them understand when it enhances their lives and when it may detract from real-world experiences.
 - **Prioritizing In-Person Connections:** Early adolescence is a time for strengthening peer relationships. We emphasize the importance of in-person connections to support emotional health, empathy, and active listening.
 - **Choosing Quality Over Quantity:** At this stage, students begin to discern which media align with their values. We encourage working with your child to select age-appropriate, meaningful content, and establishing “tech-free” spaces and times to reinforce a balanced approach.
 - **Supervised Media Consumption:** To ensure a safe and positive experience, any media consumption at this stage should be done with an adult present, allowing parents to guide content choices and engage in discussions about what children are watching or playing.
 - **Disabling Video Auto-Play:** Auto-play features should be disabled on all devices used by children to encourage intentional viewing choices. By removing auto-play, children have greater control over what they watch, reducing passive consumption and limiting exposure to potentially unsuitable content.
 - **Limiting Video Game Use:** If video games are part of media use, they should be age-appropriate, non-violent, and time-restricted, with adults present to supervise and discuss content. Limiting game use helps students maintain a balanced sense of play and stay connected to the physical world.
2. **Digital Hygiene:** Developing habits that support safe, responsible technology use ensures students can engage with media without compromising their physical and mental health.
 - **Practicing Screen Time Moderation:** Adolescents are encouraged to take breaks and set limits, helping prevent excessive screen use, which can disrupt sleep and increase stress.
 - **Protecting Privacy and Recognizing Content Impact:** Students learn the importance of safeguarding personal information and critically assessing online content. These habits help them make informed choices and avoid potentially harmful situations.
 - **Device Security and Filters:** To further support safe digital use, all devices accessible to children should be equipped with child filters and security settings to limit internet access to age-appropriate content. This added layer of security helps prevent exposure to unsuitable material and fosters a safer online experience.

3. **Digital Citizenship:** In middle school, students are introduced to digital citizenship, learning to approach online interactions with respect, kindness, and responsibility.
 - **Respectful Communication:** Adolescents are guided to use empathy and respect in online interactions, just as they would in person, promoting healthy relationships and positive digital interactions.
 - **Building a Positive Digital Footprint:** Understanding that online actions leave a lasting “digital footprint” helps students become thoughtful about what they share and say, fostering responsible digital behavior.

A Lifelong Foundation

By introducing Digital Balance, Hygiene, and Citizenship at this pivotal developmental stage, we empower students to cultivate a healthy relationship with technology as they grow. These foundational skills support a safer, more connected world and enable students to use technology in ways that benefit their learning, relationships, and well-being.

A Collective Commitment and the Importance of Open Community Dialogue

In our community, guiding children toward balanced media habits is a shared endeavor. Limiting media exposure often feels countercultural, yet in a community guided by Waldorf values, a unified approach helps make this commitment both meaningful and attainable.

The Power of Collective Action

- **Modeling Healthy Boundaries:** Children learn best through observation. As parents, minimizing personal media consumption and phone use in front of our children reinforces the value of presence, focus, and connection. When we consciously choose screen-free activities, particularly during family time or shared meals, we demonstrate that the most meaningful interactions often happen in the absence of screens.
- **Creating a Support Network for Families:** Shared goals among families reduce feelings of isolation and reinforce everyone’s efforts.
- **Reducing Peer Pressure Among Children:** Community-wide media guidelines ease social pressure for children, fostering meaningful, screen-free activities.

The Value of Open Dialogue

As technology evolves, open conversations help our community adapt and uphold these shared values. Regular discussions allow us to:

- **Share Experiences and Learn Together:** Honest conversations create a supportive culture where families can exchange practical ideas and encouragement, and support each other in implementation.
- **Adapt Guidelines Collaboratively:** As children grow, ongoing dialogue enables us to refine our guidelines thoughtfully, ensuring they remain relevant and supportive of all ages.

A Unified Path Forward

With intention, openness, and trust, we are building a foundation for our children to grow in harmony with their natural development. Each family's commitment contributes to a community that prioritizes the whole child, creating a path forward that fosters curiosity, well-being, and imagination.

By joining in this commitment, we empower our children to form healthy relationships with technology, guiding them on a journey that will benefit them well beyond their time at LOCS.

Recommended Media and Technology Use by Type and Age Group

The guidelines for media use at each age stage are designed to honor the natural progression of childhood development as understood in Waldorf education. These stages reflect children's evolving needs, interests, and capacities, and our recommendations for media use align with these insights.

At LOCS, we recommend that families consider each type of media differently, as they impact children's development in various ways. Not all technology is created equal, and understanding these differences allows parents and caregivers to shape thoughtful family policies and values around each type of technology and media use. Reflecting on family values around each media type can help guide balanced, intentional usage and create a cohesive approach that supports holistic child development. We strongly recommend that your family annually reviews your values around each type and the policies you may have for each. Through these age-specific guidelines, we aim to honor children's natural stages of growth while fostering balanced relationships with media that support their physical, emotional, and cognitive development.

Types of media and considerations for each include:

1. **Passive Media (e.g., Television, Streaming Services like Hulu or Netflix)**
Family policies might consider the type of content viewed, frequency, and whether it aligns with values. Passive media can introduce concepts and stimulate interest, but it's essential to monitor for age-appropriateness. Always use review websites like common sense media to help make content decisions.⁵
2. **Interactive Content (e.g., YouTube)**
Interactive platforms often use AI-driven algorithms, which can suggest inappropriate or extreme content. Establishing family guidelines around safe viewing and setting up supervised sessions can help protect children and prevent unintended exposure.⁶
3. **Short-Form Video Platforms (e.g., TikTok)**
These platforms can rapidly capture attention and engage children through short, high-stimulation content.
4. **Interactive Devices (e.g., Tablets, Phones)**
Touch-screen devices have a pronounced effect on reward centers in the brain,

⁵ <https://www.common sense media.org/>

⁶ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-wealth/201408/dumb-dumber-interactive-screentime-is-worse-than-tv>

increasing the likelihood of dependence and overstimulation. Families may want to set clear rules on where, when and how these devices are used, focusing on intentional, limited engagement.

5. **Video Games**

Games have unique impacts, especially on reward and behavioral centers in the brain. Families should discuss values around the types of games allowed, time limitations, and any rules to ensure a balanced approach to play.

6. **Internet and Web Access**

Access to the internet introduces a wide range of content, much of which may be inappropriate or overwhelming for children. Families should consider boundaries for web access, safety filters, and guiding children toward safe, age-appropriate websites that align with family values.

7. **Social Media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook)** Social media platforms are designed to facilitate interaction but can often lead to issues with self-esteem, social comparison, and privacy concerns, especially for young users.

Early Childhood (Birth to 7 Years):

In this foundational stage, young children learn primarily through movement, sensory experiences, and imaginative play. Waldorf philosophy emphasizes imitation and open-hearted exploration. We recommend minimal to no screen exposure during this age, as screen-free time supports healthy physical and social-emotional development. Instead, we encourage family-centered activities and hands-on engagement with the natural world.

- **Passive Media:** If families decide to allow limited exposure, choose short, age-appropriate content that aligns with family values. Avoid fast-paced, overstimulating shows, which can disrupt attention and emotional regulation. Use review sites like Common Sense Media to select content.
- **Interactive Content:** Avoid platforms like YouTube, as algorithm-driven content can lead to inappropriate suggestions. If used, strictly limit exposure and always supervise content carefully. Autoplay and recommendations should remain turned off.
- **Short-Form Video:** Not recommended for this age due to high stimulation and rapid visual changes.
- **Interactive Devices:** Avoid or strictly limit the use of tablets and phones. No smartphones or personal devices.
- **Video Games:** Not recommended; prioritize physical and imaginative play.
- **Internet and Web Access:** Not recommended at this age. Introduce internet use only for co-viewed, supervised educational purposes if necessary.
- **Social Media:** Not appropriate for this age group. Focus on real-world, face-to-face interactions and imaginative play.

Middle Childhood (Ages 7 to 10):

As children transition to middle childhood, they deepen their imaginative capacities and develop a stronger sense of social awareness. During this time, children benefit from creative, experiential learning within a structured environment.

- **Passive Media:** Encourage family-oriented viewing of slow-paced, meaningful content on weekends. Reinforce content that promotes values like empathy and creativity.
- **Interactive Content:** Avoid platforms like YouTube; if used, strictly limit exposure and supervise content carefully. Autoplay and recommendations should remain turned off.
- **Short-Form Video:** Strongly discourage use due to overstimulation and limited benefits for attention span development.
- **Interactive Devices:** Avoid or strictly limit the use of tablets and phones, restricting devices primarily to educational or family-centered use. No smartphones or personal devices.
- **Video Games:** Not recommended, if choose to use strongly limit to age-appropriate, cooperatively focused, non-violent games with time restrictions. Encourage conversations about gaming's impact and prioritize offline activities.
- **Internet and Web Access:** Supervised, restricted use focusing on trusted educational sites, with child-safe filters and usage only in public family rooms.
- **Social Media:** Not recommended. Reinforce in-person communication and self-esteem development through direct social interactions.

Later Childhood (Ages 10 to 12):

In later childhood, children are increasingly drawn to social connections and group activities, balancing curiosity and independence with the need for structure.

- **Passive Media:** Promote family-friendly content and documentaries, using media as a discussion point to explore values and the world around them.
- **Interactive Content:** Can allow limited, supervised use of platforms like YouTube with guidance on critical thinking and algorithm influence. Strongly recommend turning off Autoplay and limiting recommended video features.
- **Short-Form Video:** Strongly discourage due to overstimulation. If allowed, keep strict limits and monitor content closely.
- **Interactive Devices:** No smartphones or personal devices. Introduce tablets or computers as tools for educational use only, with structured limits on duration and frequency. Discuss the importance of tech-free times and screen dependency, and use parental controls to support safe use. Examples of educational uses are procreate and libby.⁷
- **Video Games:** Not recommended, if choose to use strongly limit to age-appropriate, cooperatively focused, non-violent games with time restrictions. Encourage conversations about gaming's impact and prioritize offline activities.
- **Internet and Web Access:** Supervised use with an emphasis on educational or research purposes, with reinforced guidance on safe browsing, privacy awareness, and appropriate usage.

⁷ <https://new.sonomalibrary.org/elibrary/a-z/libby> and <https://procreate.com/>

- **Social Media:** Not recommended. Delay introduction to social media, encouraging real-world socialization and self-esteem building.

Early Adolescence (Ages 12 to 14):

In early adolescence, children's curiosity about the world grows. Waldorf philosophy considers this a time for fostering discernment and self-awareness, and parental guidance in technology remains essential.

- **Passive Media:** Encourage family-oriented viewing of meaningful, age-appropriate content. Limit usage to weekends or special occasions.
- **Interactive Content:** Limited access to platforms like YouTube with ongoing discussions around critical thinking, advertising influence, and safe usage. Autoplay and recommendations should remain turned off.
- **Short-Form Video:** Discourage use due to overstimulation. If allowed, strictly limit and monitor content closely.
- **Interactive Devices:** No smartphones until age 14. For communication, consider a basic phone or smartwatch with limited phone and text capabilities. Tablets and computers may be introduced for educational use, with structured limits and continued parental guidance.
- **Video Games:** Strongly limited to age-appropriate, non-violent games, and reinforce balanced use. Engage in conversations about the effects of gaming and prioritize physical activities.

Encourage conversations about gaming's impact and prioritize offline activities. Opt for games that emphasize teamwork, creativity, or problem-solving. Some family-friendly, cooperative options for this age group include:

- **Minecraft (Creative mode):** Encourages building and creativity in a safe, non-violent setting.
- **Animal Crossing:** Offers a gentle, social experience where kids can visit each other's islands and explore.
- **Rocket League** (with limits on competitive pressure): Focuses on teamwork and strategy in a playful environment.
- **Internet and Web Access:** Supervised use focused on educational and research activities. Continue reinforcing privacy, safe browsing, and responsible digital behavior.
- **Social Media:** No social media accounts until age 16. This delay supports identity formation, self-esteem, and social skills development before navigating online peer influence.