






In your Be Strong Online session with the Be Strong Online Ambassadors you explored the topic of **Digital Detox**.

There is a whole world online which is part of people's everyday lives. Social networks, news updates, instant messaging, games: the internet provides us with constant activity.

So much so that Ofcom's 2016 report on usage¹ showed that people spend more time online than they do sleeping in a day.

Whilst being connected to the internet can be very helpful, there are a few possible downsides:

-  Using smartphones before going to bed can delay your sleep by at least an hour²
-  Lack of sleep can lead to health problems, make you moody or mean you're less able to concentrate³
-  It can affect your relationships with friends and family: 40% of people in one study said they felt ignored by a friend or relative whose attention was entirely on their smartphone⁴

You should feel that **you control technology, not the other way round**. If you think you spend too much time online and want to moderate it, here are some tips:



Listen to people around you: it can be annoying when people tell us that we have been on our phone for too long. But try to see things from their point of view -if they are someone close to you, such as a friend or family member, they are probably trying to help by letting you know they think you could do with a break



Use activity apps: research has suggested that "remaining seated for too long can be bad for your health"⁵, so it's worth thinking about whether you spend long periods of time sitting down when you use technology. There are some great health apps around which can encourage you to get active and help you track your achievements


¹ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cmr/cmr16/bitesize.pdf> pp6


² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-34744859>


³ <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/tiredness-and-fatigue/Pages/lack-of-sleep-health-risks.aspx>


⁴ <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cmr/cmr16/bitesize.pdf> pp6


⁵ <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/sitting-and-sedentary-behaviour-are-bad-for-your-health.aspx>


 **Close apps:** think, are there any apps which you spend a lot of time on which you don't actually enjoy using? Think about uninstalling them for a while and see how you feel

 **Switch off notifications:** do you find yourself getting distracted when a notification pings up? Do you really need to be alerted about all of them? A lot of apps activate notifications automatically when you download them. Think about which ones you actually want to be notified about and switch off the rest

 **Use a timer:** if you have an important task to do and want to focus, schedule internet breaks. Set a timer or alarm for your internet use to let you know when your time's up. This will help you concentrate on finishing the thing you need to do

 **Use airplane mode:** this is a good way to help you take a quick break from the internet without having to turn your phone or tablet off. Airplane mode is also handy if you use your device as an alarm clock but don't want to be tempted to use it during the night – the alarm will still go off even when offline

 **Try a 'digital detox':** 15 million people a year are now choosing to take control by spending time offline.⁴ If you feel anxious when you're away from your device or feel hooked to it, taking a break could be a good idea. Set yourself a realistic target, let friends know that you won't be online, and see how you feel at the end of the challenge

 **Talk to someone:** if you're worried you may be spending too much time online, it may be helpful to talk to a friend, family member or trusted adult.
<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cmr/cmr16/bitesize.pdf>



Your child has taken part in a Be Strong Online session, a new peer-to-peer learning programme from The Diana Award charity in partnership with Vodafone and supported by Parent Zone.

Discuss, don't dictate

By the time children have reached secondary school age, it can be difficult to change established habits. The best thing to do is have open and honest discussions with your child about your concerns, and find positive solutions together





Say no to negativity

The term 'detox' can imply that the thing you are cutting down on is toxic. Your child is unlikely to respond if you approach a conversation about the time they spend online from a position that the internet is 'bad'. Explain that, as with most things in life, striking a balance is key

Be practical

It's not practical for children and young people still at school to take a break from the online world completely – how would they do their homework, for one thing? If they have special educational needs, they may find online easier than offline communication

But there *are* **practical suggestions** you can make to help them cut down, such as:

-  Turn off notifications on social media apps
-  Uninstall and close apps for a set time to see how they feel without them. Do they really miss them?
-  Use the timer function on their phones or tablet to schedule 'internet breaks'
-  Set their device to airplane mode or turn it off for agreed periods, gradually extending them as they get used to being offline

Act as a role model






It's difficult to encourage your children to cut down on the time they spend online if they see you constantly updating your Facebook status or checking how your current eBay auction is doing

If you want to encourage your children to modify their internet use, it helps if you can do the same yourself

Encourage tech-free moments

With younger children, it's easy for parents to suggest family days out or activities together that don't involve technology. As children get older, their lives become more independent from you and it's neither right nor possible to control what they do all the time

But you *can* encourage them to **pursue activities away** from their screens, such as:

-  Playing sport
 -  Learning a musical instrument
 -  Signing up for a local drama group
 -  Going to the skate park with their friends
 -  Encouraging them to join a youth group or organisation like the Scouts
- Local authorities often have information about free activities for young people on their websites, so encourage them to take a look at what's going on in your area





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