



INTRODUCTION - GRADES 7/8

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, when you're using digital media, it's hard to stop. Lots of people even say they feel "addicted" to their phones or the apps and games they use. But is digital media actually designed to get you hooked? Have students think about the ways different digital media does – and does not – help us find healthy media balance. Students will also learn about the importance of creating screen-free times and zones within their day-to-day lives as a way to achieve media balance, get the restorative sleep they need and stay connected off-line with family and friends.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Explore ways that different digital media are, and aren't, designed to help them make good media choices
- Consider what "media balance" means, and how to develop good, healthy habits when using digital media
- Understand the concept of "screen-free times and zones", how they can contribute to achieving media balance and create personal guidelines for promoting healthy media balance

MATERIALS NEEDED

Classroom Resources

- Lesson slides
- Video: [Teen Voices: The Pressure to Stay Connected](#)
- Handout: Balancing Act

Take-home Resources

- Family digital media check-up and family media plan worksheets

Sample e-mail Home (in addition, attach the family digital media check-up/media plan document or print and send home with students)

Hello!

Our school/class is participating in Project Reset: Finding Digital Balance, a digital literacy and well-being program led by a committee with representatives from health promotion, mental health, speech language and education. Today we did an activity about finding balance in our digital lives. We talked about different ways to use our time such as active time, learning time, family/friend time and screen time and discussed ways we can balance our time with different activities. One way to help us find balance between on-screen and off-screen activities is to make a family media plan. In order to complete the family media plan it can be helpful to first do a digital media balance checkup on your family. Go through the attached conversation starters and checklist together to see if your media use is balanced, then you can use the family media plan to make some changes if needed. The family media plan is a very basic worksheet that you can talk about and complete together as a family. The worksheet focuses on two simple components; screen free times and screen free zones. Other examples of family media plans with more options or ideas can be found at:

- [Common Sense media family plan link](#)
- [Media smarts media plan link](#)
- [American academy of pediatrics \(healthychildren.org\) media plan link](#)

CREATIVE PROJECT CONTEST

- Introduce creative project contest using information hand-out



LESSON PLAN - GRADES 7/8

WARM-UP - ATTENTION GETTER

10 MINUTES

Project *slide 4*. Have students reflect on the image and then discuss with a partner. Call on pairs to share responses and explain their captions.

Ask: *What are some things you like to do on your phone or other devices?* As students respond, highlight any of the following actions they mention:

- text and read texts
- play games
- post and check on social media
- listen to music
- watch videos
- read news articles and blog posts

Ask: *Why do you enjoy doing these different activities?* Encourage students to pinpoint specific reasons for their device use, including getting positive feelings, being entertained, engaging in their interests, and maintaining relationships.

Explain to students that when we use media and devices, sometimes we have specific reasons for doing so, but sometimes we don't have a reason or goal. We do them out of **habit** (*slide 5*). If necessary, provide some examples of habits, including running fingers through hair, cracking knuckles and biting fingernails.

Ask: *Going back to your list of the things you like to do on your phone or device, do you think you ever do those things out of habit? If so, do you think that's a good or bad thing?* Invite students to respond and ask whether they think these habits are positive or negative.

Say: *Using digital media can be fun and interesting. In fact, it's built to be that way. The features of your devices and the apps, games and websites you interact with have all been designed by people who want to get your attention. Next, we are going to talk about how they do that and how it affects you.*

WATCH AND ANALYZE: WHY DO WE GET HOOKED?

15 MINUTES

Show the **Teen Voices: The Pressure to Stay Connected** video and have students discuss the questions on *slide 6* with a partner.

Guide students to understand that features like auto play on Netflix and YouTube, likes and comments on social media apps, and goals and levels in online gaming increase people's use of these tools. These design features can sometimes lead us to form unhealthy habits like checking our phones obsessively and spending more time online than we'd like.

Say: *Our brains are wired to build habits. We have habits for our daily routines, like brushing our teeth or things we do to get ready for school. Tech designers understand the power of habits. Their job is to get you to use their devices or tools as a habit, without even thinking about it. This makes them successful and makes them more money. This is called **addictive design** (*slide 7*).*

Point out that addictive design works because it uses **feedback loops** (*slide 7*). Feedback loops create a kind of reward that makes a habit stick. You do something, you get a response that makes you feel good, and then you want to do it again.

Ask: How does social media use addictive design like feedback loops to get and keep your attention? Students may note the following features:

- likes, dislikes or other ratings
- comments
- the ability to share pictures and see other people's pictures
- streaks
- videos with autoplay features
- livestreaming

CREATE: MY SCREEN FREE TIMES AND ZONES MEDIA CHALLENGE

20 MINUTES

Project slide 8 and read the definition of media balance. **Ask:** What are some examples of having media balance? Possible responses include:

- establishing a daily routine for using favourite media (such as checking Snapchat after homework is done)
- mixing on-screen activities with off-screen activities

Ask: Why is media balance important? Invite students to share. Possible responses include:

- people want to enjoy the benefits of media without the negative effects
- media can be entertaining but too much media can interfere with other activities, such as homework, family time, sports, hobbies, sleep and other interests
- media can connect people, but sometimes it isolates some people or creates conflict between people

Say: A great way to create more balance in your life and reduce time spent on digital media is to create screen-free times and zones throughout the day. Are there times and/or places during the day that you think should or could be screen free? (Examples: during mealtimes, in the vehicle, in bedrooms). Have them pair share and then share out - capture the responses on slide 9.

Ask: Do you (or your family/caregivers) already have any of these screen-free times and/or zones established?

Project slide 12 and go through. **Say:** As you can see from this slide, there are some pretty big benefits to our health and well-being from incorporating times or places throughout the day where screens are off-limits. By show of hands, who thinks they could use more of these things in their daily lives?

Distribute the **Balancing Act Student Handout**. Look back at slide 9 and **say:** let's look at our list. These are great ideas for screen-free times and zones as ways to find media balance, but different strategies work for different people. Which ones might work for you and your family/caregivers? Have them fill out the handout.

Send home family media check-up and media plan worksheet and request that parents/caregivers sign and/or complete the worksheet and return to school with a deadline.

Introduce the creative project contest using contest details handout provided.



BALANCING ACT



Choose

Thinking about the ideal list of screen-free times and zones, choose 1-2 that you would like to try with your family/caregivers. Why did you choose what you did?

Challenge

Challenge yourself. Make a plan for how you are going to implement this change for [insert time frame]. What are some steps you can take to increase your chances of success? (For example, charge your device in the kitchen overnight instead of in your bedroom).

Boost

Boost your challenge. Write out your commitment and hang it on the classroom wall.