

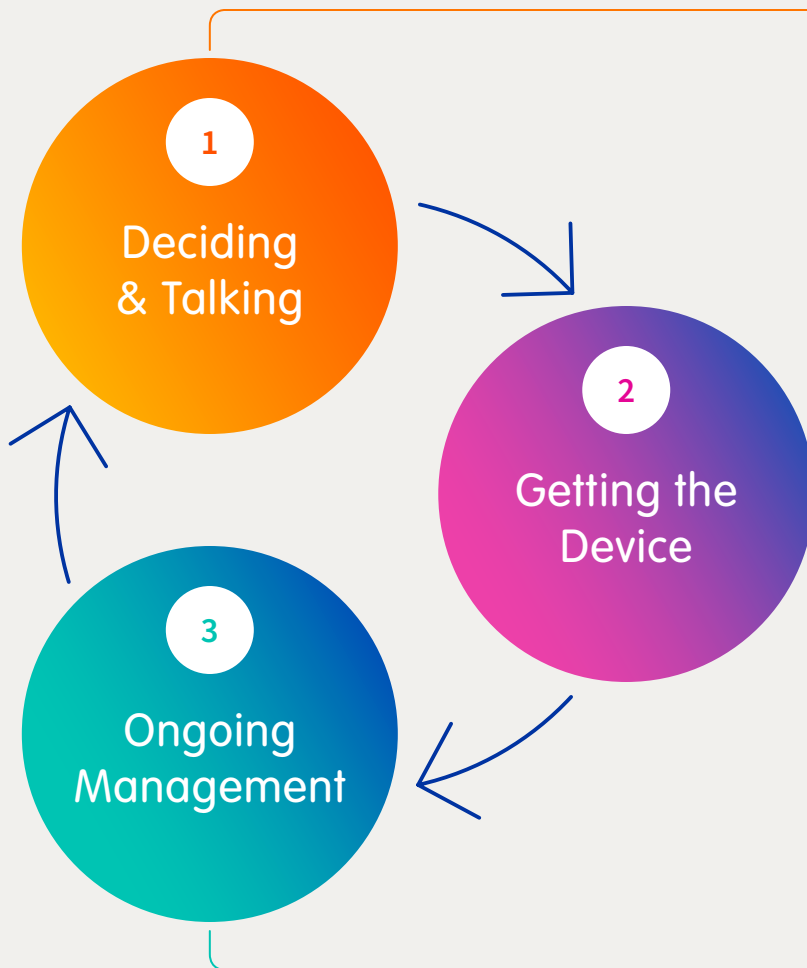
A Parent's Guide to the Family Tech Cycle

SESAME WORKSHOP

Joan Ganz Cooney Center

Every family experiences these stages each time a new device, app, or platform enters the home. Parents have told us that it can feel exhausting to manage all of these tech decisions. Here are some insights and ideas that parents and kids have shared with us.

THE FAMILY TECH CYCLE



IDEAS FROM REAL FAMILIES

STAGE 1

- + Ask playful “Would You Rather?” questions to open a conversation that doesn’t feel like a lecture (e.g., “Give up your phone for a year, or never eat pizza again?”).
- + Use dinner-table question prompts to talk casually about online life.
- + Build a simple readiness checklist together: can they manage their time, keep track of belongings, handle a tricky message?
- + As you get closer to making the decision, have conversations about expectations and acceptable use and time.

STAGE 2

- + Discuss settings during unboxing and setup, including reminders about expectations and acceptable use and time.
- + Use a visible “time left” indicator so screen time limits aren’t a surprise.
- + Give a grace period before time’s up, so kids can exit games or chats gracefully.
- + Establish “No Device Zones” at home (dinner table, bedrooms) — and make the rule apply to grown-ups too.

STAGE 3

- + Keep a spinner or choice deck on hand with screen-free activities.
- + Hold a periodic family check-in to revisit rules as your kid grows.
- + Let privileges be earned through demonstrated responsibility, not just an age cutoff.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

It's a constant battle. Maybe I'm not parenting in the right way, but it's like constant stress that is exhausting—it's put on me, and then it makes me mad that I have to deal with it.

—PARENT IN ASHLAND, MISSOURI

KEEP IN MIND

YOU'RE IN GOOD COMPANY

Parents everywhere told us they feel overwhelmed by constant decisions and hard-to-find settings.

THERE'S NO SINGLE “RIGHT AGE”

Readiness depends on your child's maturity and habits— not a birthday.

Source: Lenhart, A. (2025). *The Family Tech Cycle: Navigating Screens, Devices, and Social Media*. Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop.

SCAN TO READ



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