RECLAIMING FOCUS: DIGITAL LIFE DISCUSSIONS

Gaming and Group Chats

Grades 3 to 5 · Tuesday, November 17, 2026. What we talked about, one thing to try at home, and your son's Family Media Agreement overleaf.

97%
of US boys aged 13 to 17 play video games. Six in ten play daily.

58%
of boys who game often feel part of a group that likes them.

70%
of boys who play games with chat have seen bullying or harassment.

237
notifications a day at the median. Snapchat and Discord send the most.

Sources: Pew Research Center, 2024 · Common Sense Media, Boys in the Digital Wild, 2025 · Common Sense Media, Constant Companion, 2023. Links on this page are live.

What the research says

Gaming is mostly social

Almost every boy plays, and most play with people they already know. Gaming disorder affects a small minority, and it is defined by impairment rather than by hours. You can address problems long before that threshold.

Watch the conversation around the game

Group chats add him without asking, make leaving costly, and travel by screenshot. More than half of boys have already stood up for someone being targeted. Spending, game design, and what gaming crowds out matter too.

Change the bedtime routine

Phones and consoles charge outside the bedroom. Screens off an hour before bed. Notifications off overnight, which is a setting rather than a negotiation.

Rules change as he gets older

Limits track with less screen use in younger children, and the effect fades with age. Browning recommends writing the rules with your son, so he can explain why they exist. ABCD Study, 11,868 US children.

Try this at home: Fire Drill

Your son is in a group text with boys from his class. It turns on someone else. He is just watching it happen. What does he actually do in the next minute?

- Ask him first, before you offer an answer. Listen for whether he has the words ready.
- Then teach one of four: change the topic, say hold up in the chat itself, ask you, or take it offline.
- Pick the one he would actually use. One is enough.

Where to start, 3 to 5

Gaming. Look up the game before he plays it. Set voice chat to friends only.

Group chats. Set contacts only, and rehearse what he does when a message turns mean.

Worth reading

- Common Sense Media, Parents' Ultimate Guide to your 10 to 12 year old's digital world
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Group Chats and Middle Schoolers
- Thumbs Down. Speak Up., free Family Toolkit, a recommended resource for tweens

Build your family's agreement together at focus.browning.edu/agreement. The version overleaf is a starting point to adapt. Tell us what worked: forms.gle/hdkaLfXUfnQcNJnz9

Drafted with AI assistance, then reviewed and edited by Browning faculty and staff. Developed and revised with our community over the past year.

IN YOUR BREAKOUT ROOM · 25 MINUTES · GRADES 3 TO 5

Your breakout room

These sessions are self-directed. Work through this page together as a group. Everything your room needs is here.

Before you begin · 2 minutes

Two roles first. If they were not assigned before the rooms opened, agree on them now.

A timekeeper, who calls each move. Without one, the first conversation takes the whole session.

A scribe, who takes notes in the chat and posts the room's closing sentence. That sentence is the only thing that leaves this room.

Then introduce yourselves: first names, and your son's grade.

Ground rules. Please read these aloud before you start. Nothing anyone says about their own family leaves this room, and we ask that you not name other boys or other families.

Fire Drill · 10 minutes

Adapted from the Thumbs Down. Speak Up. Family Toolkit, a resource we recommend.

> Your son is in a group text with boys from his class. It turns on someone. Not on him, on another boy. He is just watching it happen.

- **On your own, one minute.** What does he actually do in the next minute? Not what you would want. What he would really do.
- **Round the room.** Share your answer, and notice how much the room agrees. More than half of boys have already stepped in for someone being targeted, so the question is usually not whether he would, but whether he has the words ready.
- **Read these four together.** Four things he could do: **C**hange the topic · **H**old up, guys, typed into the group chat where everyone sees it, not privately · **A**sk a trusted adult · **T**ake it offline.
- **Discuss.** Which of the four would your son actually use? What would you have to say to him tonight for him to use it?

The agreement · 10 minutes

Turn to the Family Media Agreement overleaf. It is a starting point to adapt together, not a finished document. Take one question at a time and mark the page as you go. About three minutes each.

Connect

What in here already describes your household? Underline it.

Extend

Now that you have done the activity, what would you add? Write it in the margin.

Challenge

What does not work, is missing, or is wrong for a boy this age? Circle it.

One sentence · 3 minutes

Agree on one change to the 3 to 5 section of the guide. A change, not a topic. Scribe posts it in the chat before the room closes, then everyone returns to the main room.

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FAMILY MEDIA AGREEMENT · GRADES 3 TO 5

A starting point, not a finished document. Read it together, change what does not fit your family, and build your own at **focus.browning.edu/agreement**

Take Care

- I will take care of classroom and family devices and report anything broken or lost.
- I understand devices belong to the family unless I paid for them myself.
- I will not download apps or change settings without permission.

Stay Safe

- I will not create accounts without my family's permission.
- I will not share my full name, address, school name, or photos without permission.
- I will not share my passwords with anyone except a parent.
- I will tell a parent immediately if anyone makes me feel pressured or uncomfortable online.
- I know some people online pretend to be someone they're not.

Think First

- Before I share anything online, I will ask: would I be okay if everyone I know saw this?
- I will not spread rumors, gossip, or mean content about anyone online.
- I know that not everything I read or see online is true — I will check before I believe it.
- I understand AI can create fake photos, videos, and voices of real people.
- I will give credit when I use someone else's work or ideas.

Stay Balanced

- I will help my family set screen time limits and then follow them.
- I will not use screens in my bedroom.
- I will choose what I watch — not let YouTube or another app choose for me.
- I will have at least one hour of physical activity or outdoor time each day.
- Devices charge outside my bedroom every night.

Communicate Openly

- I will tell my parents what apps, games, and websites I use.
- I will tell a parent if I see something online that upsets me or doesn't seem right.
- I will be honest about how much time I've spent on screens.

Connecting Screen Commitment

- We will pick a film or show together at least once a week and watch it as a family.
- I will not use a device when we're eating together as a family.
- When I game, I will prefer games I can play with a friend or family member in the room.

In exchange, our family agrees to

- To listen to what interests him online and engage with his world rather than dismiss it.
- To talk with him about our concerns before saying no.
- To help him find shows, games, and content that are worth his time.
- To keep devices in shared spaces and charge them outside bedrooms for everyone.
- To model the screen habits we want him to have.
- To take media literacy seriously — help him question what he sees online.
- To use Apple Screen Time or Google Family Link to support healthy defaults.

Isolating screen warning signs

- He has stopped playing and only watches other people play. Worth asking about rather than assuming.
- He is watching for long periods without choosing what comes next.
- He reaches for a screen immediately after school or whenever he has free time.
- He is reluctant to stop and becomes irritable when asked to.

Student signature & date

Parent / Guardian signature & date

Revisit: September and February each year · Framework: Common Sense Media · Browning Reclaiming Focus Initiative

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