RECLAIMING FOCUS: DIGITAL LIFE DISCUSSIONS

Gaming and Group Chats

Grades 6 to 8 · 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: Flip the Script

When he asks for a group chat or a Discord account, the instinct is to list what worries you. Do the opposite.

- Ask him one question: what should we talk about and plan for before we set this up?
- Then stop talking and let him answer. Write down what he says.
- Compare his list to the agreement overleaf. What did he raise that it does not cover?

Where to start, 6 to 8

Gaming. Money in games: loot boxes, skins, and the spending caps you can set tonight.

Group chats. Before the first chat or Discord account, write the rules together and the reasons beside them.

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 6 TO 8

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.

Flip the Script · 10 minutes

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

> When your son asks for a group chat or a Discord account, the instinct is to list what worries you. Do the opposite.

- **On your own, one minute.** Write down the three things you think your son would say if you asked him: what should we talk about and plan for before we set this up?
- **Round the room.** Read your three. Have someone type them all into the chat as you go. You are building a list.
- **Discuss.** How much of that list is already in the agreement overleaf? What do you think your sons would raise that it does not cover?
- **Worth knowing:** Discord's minimum age is 13, and Browning recommends waiting until Grade 8 for peer group texting. That is our recommendation, not a rule. Pediatric guidance allows for readiness and for small, known groups. If your son is already past that line, say so. What the guide should tell a family in that position is exactly the kind of revision we want.

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 6 to 8 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 6 TO 8

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 school and personal devices and report anything lost, broken, or stolen.
- I understand my school Chromebook belongs to Browning and must be returned in good condition.
- I will not modify school devices, install unauthorized apps, or attempt to bypass the school's web filters.

Stay Safe

- I will not share passwords with friends — only with a parent if necessary.
- I will use privacy settings on any accounts I have and review them with a parent.
- I will tell a trusted adult immediately if anyone contacts me in a way that feels wrong.
- I will not share other people's private photos, screenshots, or messages without permission.
- I will not join group chats I haven't agreed to be part of.

Think First

- Before posting anything, I will ask: would I be okay if a teacher, college, or employer saw this?
- I will not bully, humiliate, or exclude anyone online — including in group chats.
- Screenshot = escalation: I will not share screenshots of private conversations.
- I will stand up to bias, racism, and misogyny in group chats — or leave.
- I will disclose all AI use to my teachers fully and honestly.
- I understand that undisclosed AI use may be considered academic dishonesty.

Stay Balanced

- My phone charges outside my bedroom every night — no exceptions on school nights.
- I will not game alone after 9pm on school nights.
- I will take real breaks from screens — walks, meals, conversations without devices.
- I will review my screen time report with a parent once a month.
- If screen use is making me unhappy or hard to stop, I will tell a family member.

Communicate Openly

- I will tell my parents which group chats I'm in.
- If something goes wrong in a chat, I will take it offline before it escalates.
- I will tell a parent if I receive something that upsets me or makes me uncomfortable.
- I will be honest about AI use at school and at home.

Connecting Screen Commitment

- We will have at least one shared screen experience per week — a film, a series, something we choose together.
- When I game, I will prefer cooperative games with a friend physically present when possible.
- Devices at meals are off — for everyone in the household.

In exchange, our family agrees to

- To know which group chats he's in without reading every message.
- To talk to him about what we see online before assuming the worst.
- To trust him and talk to him when we have concerns — not surveil first.
- Not to contact other parents about a conflict without talking to him first.
- To be consistent: the same device rules apply to adults in the house.
- To support him if he chooses to leave a group chat that is toxic.
- To have conversations about what he sees — AI, social media, group dynamics — without lecturing.

Isolating screen warning signs

- He is gaming alone late at night regularly — especially on school nights.
- He seems more anxious or agitated after being on his phone.
- He is reluctant to put his device down when asked.
- His social life is increasingly online-only and he is harder to reach in person.
- He has withdrawn to his room with a device and doesn't want to come out.

Student signature & date

Parent / Guardian signature & date

Revisit: September and January each year, and any time a new platform or group chat emerges · Framework: Common Sense Media · Browning Reclaiming Focus Initiative

focus.browning.edu · Reclaiming Focus: Digital Life Discussions · The Browning School, November 17, 2026
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