RECLAIMING FOCUS: DIGITAL LIFE DISCUSSIONS

Gaming and Group Chats

Grades 9 to 10 · 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: Drop the Why

Why puts people on the defensive. It asks them to justify something. When, how, and what ask them to describe something instead.

- Write down the last question you asked him about his phone or his gaming.
- Does it start with why?
- Rewrite it. "Why are you still on that?" becomes "What were you all playing tonight?"

Where to start, 9 to 10

Gaming. Ask what he is like in there, not only what he sees.

Group chats. Move from checking to asking.

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 9 TO 10

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.

Drop the Why · 10 minutes

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

Why puts people on the defensive. It asks them to justify something. When, how, and what ask them to describe something instead.

- **On your own, one minute.** Write down the last question you asked your son about his phone or his gaming. The actual words, as best you remember.
- **Look at it.** Does it start with why? Plenty of ours do.
- **On your own, one minute.** Rewrite it without the word why. "Why are you still on that?" becomes "What were you all playing tonight?"
- **Round the room.** Read the before and the after. Then discuss: what happens in your house when you ask a why question?

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 9 to 10 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 9 TO 10

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 am responsible for both my Chromebook and my ReMarkable — I will report any issues promptly.
- I understand Browning devices are for learning and I will use them accordingly.
- I will not use school devices to access personal accounts or entertainment during the school day.

Stay Safe

- I will use strong, unique passwords and not share them with friends.
- I will review the privacy settings on my accounts at least once a year with a parent.
- I will tell a trusted adult if I am being harassed, pressured, or targeted online.
- I understand that screenshots and messages I share can travel far beyond who I intended.

Think First

- I will Google my own name at least twice a year to know my digital footprint.
- I will not post anything I would not want a college admissions officer, coach, or future employer to see.
- I will disclose and cite all AI use in my academic work — fully and honestly.
- I will interrogate AI output: evaluate it, push back on it, and take genuine intellectual ownership.
- I understand that AI-generated work I cannot explain is not my work.
- I will give proper credit to sources, including AI tools.

Stay Balanced

- My phone still charges outside my bedroom on school nights.
- I will review my screen time report with a parent monthly — as a habit check, not a punishment.
- I will prioritize sleep over screens: devices off at a consistent time each night.
- I will choose screens intentionally — not as a default response to boredom.
- If screen use is interfering with sleep, schoolwork, or relationships, I will say so.

Communicate Openly

- I will have honest conversations with my family about my AI use at school.
- I will tell a parent if something online feels wrong, dangerous, or overwhelming.
- I will be honest about my screen time habits — not minimize them.

Connecting Screen Commitment

- We will maintain at least one shared screen ritual — a series, a film, something we choose together.
- I will be present at meals — phone away, conversation available.
- I recognize that a screen that connects me to people I care about is different from one that isolates me.

In exchange, our family agrees to

- To shift from monitoring to conversation — to ask rather than check.
- To follow his social media accounts — not to surveil but to know him there.
- To review screen time reports together as a habit-awareness practice, not a policing tool.
- To model the screen habits we want him to build — including our own.
- To trust his judgment and engage with his mistakes as learning, not failures.
- To support him when AI pressure at school feels overwhelming.

Isolating screen warning signs

- His social life exists almost entirely online — he has followers but not close friends.
- He is using AI to avoid thinking rather than to think better.
- He is uncomfortable with silence, unstructured time, or being unreachable.
- He is more withdrawn after screen time than before.

Student signature & date

Parent / Guardian signature & date

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

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