

5. Stories for your family

Document 5 of 5



Picture made with AI image generation (OpenAI)

Your selected stories, with their notes and sources.

3D · Divert · Discomfort → Delight

HDI rests on one simple idea: 3D. Three words, easy to keep in mind on a hard day.

3D is the umbrella over every model, and it runs through each one. 3D is also a way back to three dimensions: up and down, forward and back, left and right. Smells, sounds, colours and the freedom of open space. The screen is flat; the world your body and senses know best is not.

Divert. When the pull toward the screen comes, willpower alone rarely wins. Turn toward something that does you more good. The things you can turn to are your copers.

Discomfort. The first days of any change feel awkward. That is not a sign it is failing. What carries you through are your energizers: they give you the energy to keep going.

Delight. Repeat the new step, and what took effort becomes familiar, then something you enjoy and choose for yourself.

Each model below is three words: two ways, and where they lead. Remember the letter, and the words come back. Each one is grounded in published research on coping and motivation.

Energizers

Energizers give you the energy to get through the Discomfort.

3M · Meaning · Momentum → Mastery
Meaning — know why it matters to you; Momentum — keep going, and start again kindly after a slip; Mastery — setbacks stop deciding for you

3E · Environment · Energize → Empower
Environment — arrange your space so the good choice is the easy one; Energize — act first; the feeling follows; Empower — the change becomes yours

Copers

Copers are what you can Divert to instead of the screen.

3O · Others · Outdoors → Outstanding
Others — people, face to face; Outdoors — time outside, in nature; Outstanding — feeling fully alive

3A · Awe · Alertness → Achievement
Awe — something bigger than you; Alertness — attention out, here and now; Achievement — doing something that means something to you

3B · Basics · Body → Balance
Basics — sleep, meals and rest without a screen; Body — move in your free time; Balance — a body that can switch off and recover

3S · Separation · Solitude → Success
Separation — distance from the phone; Solitude — time alone, without distraction; Success — you steer your day again

3F · Filter · Focus → Flow
Filter — let in only what matters; Focus — one task at a time; Flow — deep absorption in something worth doing

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This report is your view of your teenager's digital life, told from what you can see at home. It is not a measure of your teenager. Much of that life is visible only if your teenager chooses to share it. Where your view and theirs differ, that is not a mistake; it is worth knowing.

The Cleared Table

Helps with: Devices at shared meals

Try 1 in the document “Six weeks, one step at a time” comes from this story.



Maja, this one reached you through phones at shared meals. Here is a story about Irena, whose kitchen table has not been a table for a long time.

Irena shares a flat on Riverside with her mother and her daughter Vanja, who is thirteen. The flat has one table. In the daytime it is Irena's desk, because she does bookkeeping from home. In the evening it is Vanja's desk. In between it is where the clean laundry waits to be folded, which is most of the time.

So for a long time they have eaten on the sofa. The three of them sit in a row with their plates on their knees and the quiz programme on, Irena's mother answering every question out loud, mostly right. Their phones are on the cushions next to them. It is warm, and it works.

One Sunday Vanja is telling them about a school trip, and halfway through the quiz comes back from the break, and her grandmother turns to it, and Vanja stops. The programme is simply louder.

The next Sunday Irena clears the table. She moves the laundry to the bed, her papers to a box, and Vanja's books to the windowsill. It takes twenty minutes. She asks if they can eat there, just on Sundays, with the television off and the phones on the shelf in the hall. Hers too.

Her mother says, "And the quiz?"

"Only on Sundays. We'll miss the Sunday one."

Her mother says she will survive.

The first Sunday at the table is awkward. They have not sat facing each other to eat in a long time, and nobody knows where to look. Vanja eats fast. Irena's mother tells a long story about a neighbour's dog. Vanja says nothing about school, and Irena does not ask.

The second Sunday Vanja leaves her phone on the shelf but goes to check it twice, between courses, and comes back. Irena does not say anything.

The third Sunday Irena's mother brings the quiz book her sister gave her years ago, and reads out questions over the soup, and Vanja answers some of them, mostly wrong, and argues about the answers.

It does not happen every week. Some Sundays the laundry is too much, and they eat on the sofa as before. Clearing the table is a job, and someone has to do it, usually Irena.

On the last Sunday of the month they leave the table clear and walk to the community garden, where Irena's mother has a plot with a friend. Vanja carries the trowels and says the garden is boring, and stays until it gets dark.

A note from us. When the table is also a desk and a laundry shelf, shared meals can move to the sofa, where the screens are. One way, where you already eat together there, is to clear the table for one of those meals, with every phone in a place away from it, yours too, and the television off. It costs clearing the table, and the programme you would have watched.

Where this comes from: two analyses of one study of American early adolescents, one at one moment, one a year later. Parents said whether screens came to meals; the young people reported their own screen time. Screens at meals went weakly with more of it a year later. Where an app measured phone time, the link did not show. Nagata and colleagues, 2025; Nagata and colleagues, 2026.

A survey and a follow-up of the same families, not trials: a weak link that ran both ways, and the cause is not shown.

It does not promise that your teen will say more at the table. A quiet meal is still a meal.

Not for everyone: not for an evening when people eat as they come in, a phone on call that night, or a home where the sofa is the only place to sit together.

Guidance, not a study: the American Academy of Pediatrics, 2026, names phone-free zones at meals.

The Old Fold

Helps with: Device ownership and history



Maja, this one comes with the report rather than from your answers. Here is a story about Nate.

Nate lives near Union Station, in an apartment with two bedrooms. One of them has a bunk bed in it. For half of each week his children are there, and the place holds four times the noise it holds for the other half.

Bea is fourteen, and she has had a phone since the year of the handovers. A handover is when the children go from one parent's home to the other's. The phone arrived the way most things arrive. The handovers went wrong twice in one month, once in the rain outside a shut library. After the second time it was obvious that somebody in the middle of the arrangement had to be able to say which house she was at. Nobody sat down about it. It was a Tuesday, and then it was done.

In January a letter comes about the phone contract. The contract has run out again, and the company asks whether he would like to renew it. He reads the letter on the platform at Union Station. Salt from the winter streets is tracked all over the station floor. The big clock above them is running its two fast minutes. Bea is further up the platform with her hood up, reading the board for a train that is not theirs. Ollie, who is eleven, is reading the letter upside down.

Nate folds the letter into his newspaper.

He has never asked himself whether that Tuesday was the right Tuesday. There was a reason with edges on it, a reason you could put your hand on. He is an engineer, and he likes a reason with edges. But it is long enough ago now to look back at. When he looks, he cannot see what the other road would have been. A Bea who waited another year: he has no drawing of her. She might be exactly this girl with her hood up. She might not. There is nobody to ask.

"Is that about Bea's phone?" Ollie says.

"It's about the bill."

"Are you going to pay it?"

"I expect so."

The train comes in. The paper goes under his arm, folded along its old fold, with the letter inside it. Ollie reads the back page over Nate's elbow the whole way, which is what he does on trains.

By the time they are home Nate has signed the form, because the handovers have not become any simpler. About the Tuesday he still has nothing he could say. He puts the letter in the drawer with the others. That is how a person files a thing that is settled, and he knows that it is only filed.

A note from us. The studies point in different directions, so this note offers no practice. The story shows a parent looking back at a decision that made itself. He cannot tell what the other choice would have looked like. Nothing here names an age, earlier or later, as the right one.

Where this comes from: two studies that followed children over time. One, registered in advance, followed children from low-income Latinx families who had overweight or obesity and were in a weight programme, and found no links that held up with symptoms of depression, school marks or sleep. In the other, young people with a smartphone were later more likely to meet the criteria for depression and to sleep too little. Its authors warn against reading that as cause. Neither tried out an age. Sun and colleagues, 2023; Barzilay and colleagues, 2026.

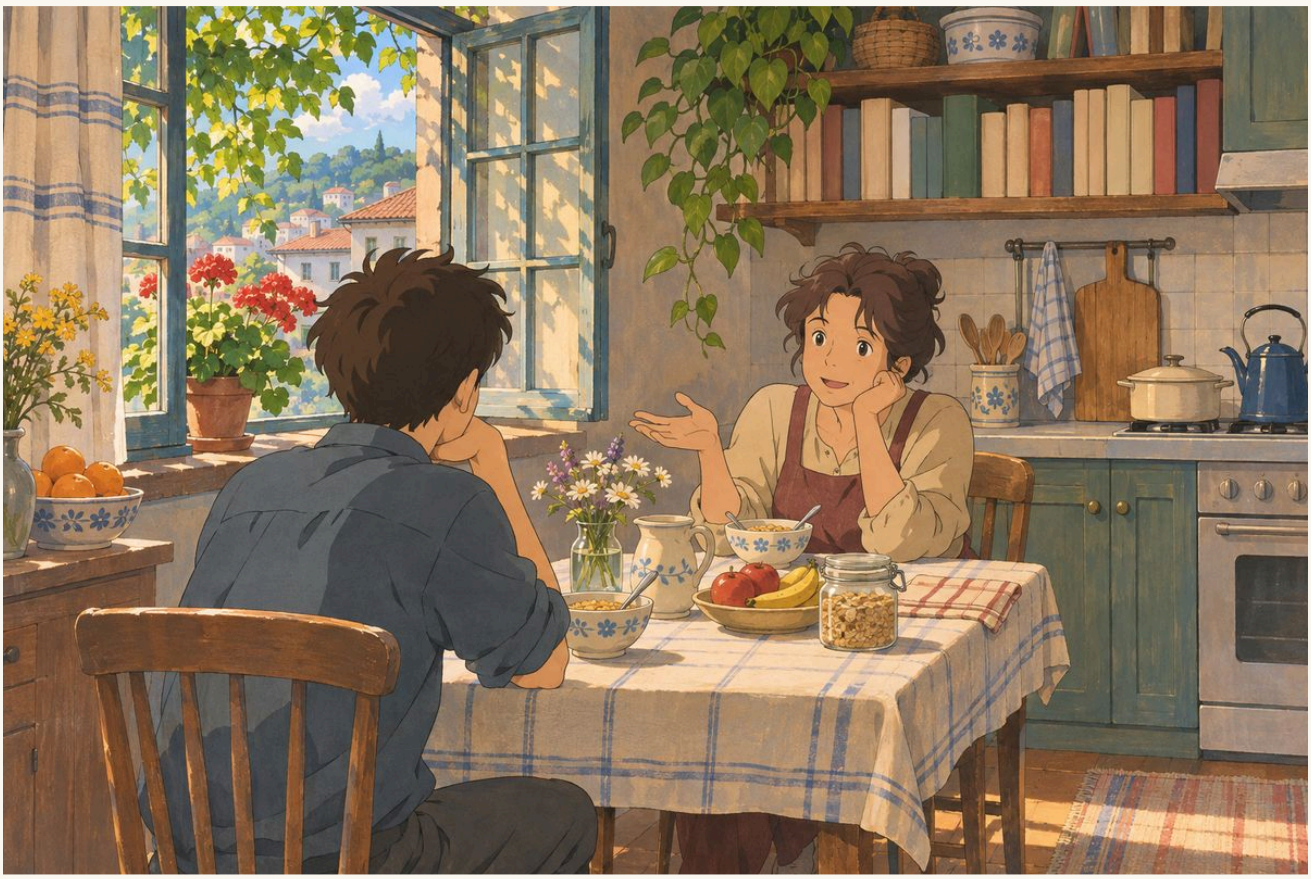
The studies point in different directions, and none tested a choice like this one.

Guidance, not a study: the American Academy of Pediatrics, 2026, states that research does not point to a specific age for a first phone.

It is not a verdict on a phone already given.

Not for everyone: where a phone is already what makes two houses, a bus route or a job work, the question is not really open, and that is a reason like any other.

The Putting-Away Bit



Maja, this one comes with the report rather than from your answers. Here is a story about Silvija.

Silvija's shift at Riverside Hospital starts in the evening, so dinner in the flat happens early, before Damjan's father gets in, whether or not anyone is hungry.

Damjan plays with his cousin, who lives in another state and is better at the game than anyone alive. They wear headsets and talk over each other, building something enormous out of blocks in a world that is half his and half his cousin's.

For a long time Silvija would call him for dinner and he would say "nearly done," and nearly was never near, and both of them ended up cross.

One Saturday at breakfast, with no game on, she asks instead how the game stops.

He looks up from his cereal. "What do you mean?"

"If I say dinner, what happens to your cousin?"

He thinks about it properly. "If I leave in the middle of a build, he has to finish my half, or it falls down. There's a bit where we both put our tools away. That's the stop."

"How do I know when you're at the bit?"

"You don't. I tell you."

They make the rule together, at the table. She calls once, early, as a warning. He says "heard" and tells his cousin. At the next putting-away bit, he comes.

The first evening it works. He comes to the table with the headset round his neck, and they eat fish and talk about the enormous thing, which turns out to be a tower with an elevator inside it.

The second evening the putting-away bit does not come for a long time. Silvija eats alone with her coat on the back of her chair. She leaves his plate in the oven to keep warm. "The oven door is hot, use the cloth," she says through his door on her way out, and he says "heard."

On the bus to the hospital she does not know which evening is the rule and which is the exception. Across the river the light on the far bank is on. A message comes from him: a picture of the tower, finished, with two small figures standing on the top.

A note from us. No practice has been tested here, so this note offers none. The story shows a mother before a night shift asking where a stop fits in a shared game, and a rule made with the player.

Where this comes from: a questionnaire built with children at the start of their teens, which asks how their parents' media rules are made and kept: explained and open to the child's view, controlling, or changing from day to day. While testing the questionnaire, the researchers found the answers linked, as they had expected, with family conflict and with kind and unkind behaviour. A study that followed children of that age for a year found no link over time between any style of rule and the children's use of violent media or their aggression. Valkenburg and colleagues, 2013; Fikkers and colleagues, 2017.

Surveys at one moment and one follow-up, of children at the start of their teens: no practice was tried, and the follow-up found no link.

This is about where a stop fits in a game, not a measure of how much your teen plays.

Not for everyone: some rules are about safety or school and are not up for a vote. If gaming worries you beyond dinner times, talking with someone who can help comes first.

Three D's: turn away, hang on, enjoy.

The Shelf

For about thirteen to sixteen, to read alone.

In Marta's family the phones spend the night in the hall, on a shelf by the front door.

The shelf is under the mirror. There is a power strip on it, and four cables hang down from it like roots. At night Mum's phone goes there, and Gran's, and Marta's, and the old tablet that nobody really uses. It has been like that since Gran moved into the flat on Northside, two winters ago. Nobody remembers deciding it. It is where the phones go, the way the keys go in the bowl.

Then the speaker on Marta's phone breaks. Everything else still works. It just will not ring, and the ring was what woke her through the door every morning.

"Wait," says Gran. She goes to her room and comes back with a clock.

It is small and round and silver, with two bells on top like ears and a little hammer between them. It winds with a key on the back. Gran says she has had it longer than she has had Marta's mum.

The first night, Marta puts it on the table by her bed and turns off the light. The clock ticks. It does not tick quietly. It ticks like someone walking up the stairs in hard shoes and never getting to the top.

She lasts until she hears the Four ring on the Ferry Street bridge, the last streetcar of the night. Then she gets up, wraps the clock in a thick winter sock and shuts it in the drawer.

In the morning she wakes to something buzzing in the drawer like a bee in a jar. She is late, but only a bit.

The next night she tries it on the floor, under a cushion. The night after, on the windowsill, behind the curtain. By the end of the week she has mostly stopped hearing it, except sometimes, just before sleep, when the ticking sounds like rain on the roof of a car.

One morning she comes into the hall and the shelf looks wrong. Gran's phone, the tablet, her own. Mum's is missing.

She finds it on the sofa. Mum is asleep there too, still in her work fleece, a blanket half on, the phone face down on her chest, rising and falling with her.

Marta lifts the phone off very slowly and puts it on the shelf with the others, on its cable. Then she goes back and pulls the blanket up to Mum's chin.

At breakfast Mum says, "Did somebody move my phone?"

"It walked," says Marta.

Gran says nothing. She is buttering toast and humming, and from Marta's room, very faintly, the clock goes on climbing the stairs.

Where this comes from: in 1787 Levi Hutchins, a clockmaker in Concord, New Hampshire, made himself a clock that could wake him. Its bell could ring at only one hour, four in the morning.

Four Places

For about thirteen to sixteen, to read alone.

Roko's table has four places and only three chairs.

The fourth place is a tablet, propped against the fruit bowl at the far end. On Sunday evenings Grandma is in it. She lives across the ocean, in the town where Dad grew up, and when it is dinner time here it is breakfast time there. So Roko and Dad and Roko's big sister Una eat soup, and Grandma eats bread and jam and drinks coffee from a cup with a chip in it that she will not throw away.

She always asks what is in the soup. Dad always tells her. She always says he has put in too much pepper, and that she can tell from there.

It has been like this for as long as Roko can remember. It is just what Sunday looks like: three bowls, one cup, and the fruit bowl holding Grandma up.

This Sunday, halfway through Roko's story about the match, the picture stops.

Her cup is halfway to her mouth, and she is caught in the middle of a blink. The sound goes on for a second, a radio somewhere in her kitchen, and then that stops too.

"Grandma?" says Una.

Grandma stays where she is, in the middle of a sip, as if she has decided to be a statue.

Dad taps the screen. Nothing. He turns the router off and on, and then stands by the window holding his own phone up in the air, as if the signal were a bird he could call down.

Roko looks at the still face at the end of the table. Then he keeps talking.

He tells the rest of the match to the tablet anyway: the corner kick, the ball off his knee, the goalkeeper diving the wrong way, the shout from the bench. Una starts laughing, and then she joins in and tells Grandma about her new job at the bakery, and the man who buys one bread roll every morning and says thank you three times.

Grandma does not move. The soup gets cold. Nobody minds.

Then the picture jumps, and Grandma puts her cup down with a clunk.

"Hello? I lost you," she says. "What did I miss?"

"Everything," says Roko. "I'll tell you again."

So he does, from the corner kick. It is a slightly better goal the second time.

Grandma listens with her chin on her hand. When he has finished, she says the goalkeeper needs glasses. Then she leans close to her screen and says the soup looks too peppery, even from there.

Where this comes from: in 1964, at the World's Fair in New York, the Bell System telephone companies let visitors try the Picturephone, a telephone with a screen that showed the person at the other end.

The Sea

For about thirteen to sixteen, to read alone.

The jigsaw on the kitchen table is a picture of the sea, which was a mistake.

Almost all of it is blue, and almost all of the blue is the same. Nela and her mum have been doing it since the start of the holidays, in the gaps. Mum is a nurse at Riverside Hospital and works nights, a few in a row, and then she is home and awake at odd times, and the jigsaw is there for the odd times.

For a week something has been sitting in Nela like a stone in a shoe.

There is a game she plays with her friends, and the game has a chat. A name she does not know started sending her messages there. Friendly ones at first. Then questions she did not want to answer, and a line saying she should keep it just between them.

She has not answered. She has not told anyone either. Her friends in the game are fine. It is not them. It is only this one name, and she keeps seeing it, even when the game is closed and the phone is in her pocket.

Tonight Mum is sorting edge pieces into a saucer. The radio is on low. Nela turns a blue piece over in her fingers and does not look up.

"Someone in the game is being weird with me."

Mum's hand stops over the saucer. For one second her face goes very still. Then she puts the piece down.

"Weird how?"

Nela tells her. It is easier with the sea in front of them, and somewhere to put her eyes. Mum listens all the way to the end. She does not take the phone. She asks if Nela wants to show her, and Nela does, and they look at it together, Mum leaning in too close and smelling of coffee, because her glasses are in the other room.

"Okay," says Mum. "Thank you for telling me. Let's block it and report it. Then toast."

Nela does the buttons. Mum reads over her shoulder and points at the wrong button twice. It takes longer than it should. When it is done, the name is gone, and the chat is just her friends again, arguing about whose turn it is.

Later Nela messages her friend Kaja, who plays too, to say what happened. Kaja writes back that the same name tried with her. She says she will tell her dad.

Mum makes the toast. They eat it standing up, looking down at the sea.

There is no boat in this picture, and no island. But later still, Mum finds the one piece with a white bird on it, a gull, far out, and holds it up between two fingers like a ticket.

Where this comes from: in the 1760s John Spilsbury, a mapmaker in London, pasted maps onto wood and cut them up along the borders between countries, for children to put back together.

Petal Fold

For about thirteen to sixteen, to read alone.

The paper crane on the kitchen table looks like a frog.

It is Filip's fourth one, and they have all looked like frogs. The paper is thin and red and square, from a pack his dad gave him at the weekend. The video is paused on the step that keeps beating him: the petal fold, where a flat square has to open like a mouth and close again into a long, thin diamond.

He plays it again, slower, and folds along with the hands on the screen, crease by crease. This time the paper opens at the right moment, and closes, and lies flat.

After that it is easy. Neck, tail, wings. The crane stands on the table, a bit crooked, with its head up, as if it has heard something.

He wants to show someone.

Mum is at the counter with her phone in one hand and a pen in the other. She runs a cleaning company, which is her, two other women and a van, and on Sunday evenings the phone does not stop: who is ill, who can swap, whose key is under which mat.

"Mum. Look."

"Mm," says Mum. Her thumb is moving. "Lovely."

She has not looked. He knows, because she said lovely. She only says lovely when she has not looked.

Filip takes another square and folds a second crane, faster this time. When Mum puts her phone down on the counter to write something, he stands the crane on top of it.

Mum looks down at it for a long moment. Then she looks across at the first one, on the table, with its head up.

"You made those?"

"Show me how," she says, before he can answer, and sits down.

He shows her. She is bad at it. Her crane comes out as a frog, a green one, and she laughs at it, properly. Halfway through her second try, the phone buzzes under the red crane. She looks over. She looks back at the paper.

Then it buzzes again, and she says, "That's Dana. Her van's got a flat," and gets up, and answers it, and is gone for a while, talking about tyres.

Filip keeps folding.

When she comes back, she sits down in the same chair, picks up the frog where she left it, and asks which bit was the mouth.

In the morning there are two birds on the windowsill, a red crane and a green frog. His mum has written something on the frog's wing in pen. It says *crane*.

Where this comes from: in 1797 a book called *Hiden Senbazuru Orikata*, "the secret of folding a thousand cranes", was printed in Kyoto, in Japan. It describes how to make paper cranes joined together, folded from a single sheet.

Your answers and this report are handled by the association HDI – Human Digital Intelligence, Zagreb, which is responsible for them. For anything about your data, write to info@hdi.vision.

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If anything in this report upsets you, or you want to talk it over with someone, write to info@hdi.vision and a person will answer. Questions about your data go to the same address.

Your answers are kept for twelve months from the day you finished answering, then deleted. You can ask for them to be deleted sooner at any time by quoting your pass code.

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