



# **A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Social Media Safety in Autistic Children**



**By SensorySafe Autism**

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# Introduction

At some point, you might have wondered what your child was doing on TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube Shorts. What kinds of content were they watching? Are they vulnerable? Does being neurodivergent change this? Well, you're in the right place. A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Social Media Safety in Autistic Children provides information about the unexpected dangers of short-form content, design recommendations from other parents as well as teachers, and step by step guides on how to make your child's online experience a little bit safer. Specifically, this guide pertains to the sensory sensitivity issues that short-form content triggers.

## Content is not the main issue

You might think that the content of the videos itself is the main problem in short-form content. Although it is a prevalent issue in all types of content, short-form content in particular has certain design features that may cause more harm to your child. One example is the "infinite scroll", where a stopping point for short-form content does not exist, but continues indefinitely, wearing your child's brain out. Many potentially harmful design features like "infinite scroll" exist, but two features – Audio and visual overstimulation – are reported to cause the most sensory harm.



### Audio Overstimulation

You might have noticed how odd the audio in short-form content is. Within one minute, users are able to scroll from a calming, informative video about sharks to an unexpected loud, blaring edit of a car. Here are two of the most common sources of sensory distress.

- Audio spikes are sharp, unexpected volume increases that thrive in short-form content. These features of videos are able to harm audio-sensitive autistic individuals by providing an unexpected source of stimuli that can lead to sensory overload.
- Layered audio is a trend in a lot of short-form videos. This occurs when multiple different audio tracks, majority being main and background music, are playing at once, creating overstimulation that can be harmful especially for an autistic child.

Additionally, these features are not accidental, but are direct results of an attention-seeking platform that profits off of the minutes that your child spends online. Neglect of these features are present in the majority of short-form platforms that your child might be watching (Ex: TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts).

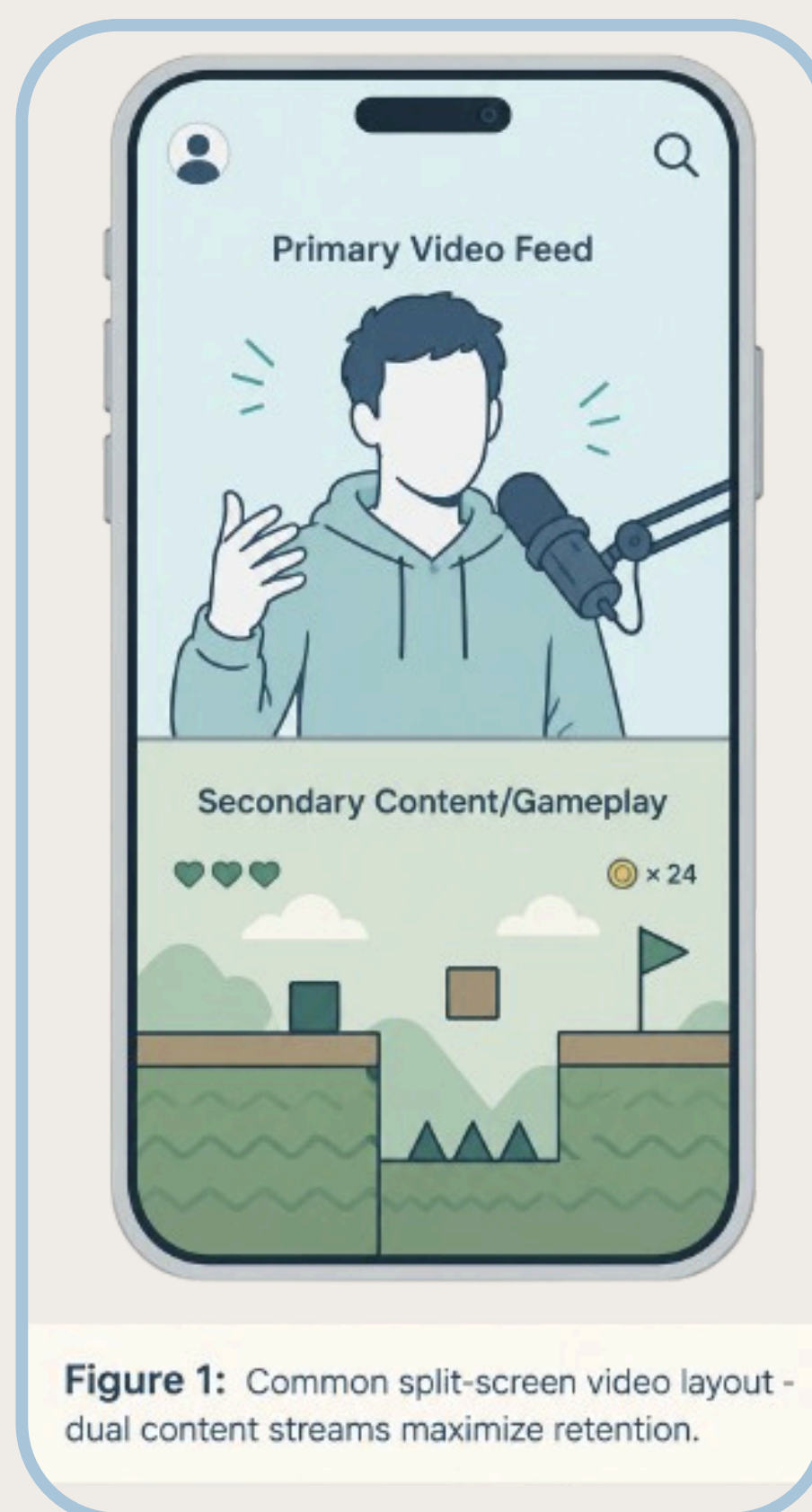


**Figure 1:** Common split-screen video layout - dual content streams maximize retention.



### Visual overstimulation

Short-form content doesn't only affect the ears of your child. Similarly, these videos contain heavy uses of visual overstimulation, or triggers that come in through the eyes of your child. Some of these triggers are implemented through these features:

- Flickering Lights – bright lights that flicker, usually without any warning
- Rapid cuts – rapid switches of angles, point of views, or anything that catches the attention of the user
- The Split-screen trend – a type of video content that contains two videos playing at once – a main video on top, with a "brain rot" video on bottom (usually video games such as subway surfers)

All of these uses can, again, cause sensory overload, especially to children that are sensitive visually. These features are designed to catch attention, neglecting the harms that they can do on children like yours. However, there are simple solutions that can be implemented to counter these adverse features to protect your child online – just a little bit more.

**Key Insight:** Short-form algorithms are engineered for **maximum retention**, but their sudden audio spikes and rapid visual edits can trigger severe sensory overload in neurodivergent users.

# About the Data

This data was not just gathered from the internet, or simply a hypothesis. Instead, data for all of the information above came directly from a survey involving more than 25 parents of autistic children along with special education teachers who gave feedback and support for these results.

25+

Parents and Special Education Teachers Surveyed

**“I would like apps to have better content filters, warnings for flashing lights and loud sounds, and stronger parental controls. ”**

[ Educator ]

**Audio adjustments would be nice or being able to filter out videos that jump around or flicker**

[ Parent ]

**→ Up Next: Step-by-Step Fixes for both Apple and Android Devices**

# The Fixes

This step by step guide provides some protections against the dangers of short-form content. These protections cannot totally neutralize a video, but can mitigate some of its damages. In other words, it cannot change the videos themselves, but can present them in a less stimulating way. Additionally, a lot of these features are headphone-oriented.



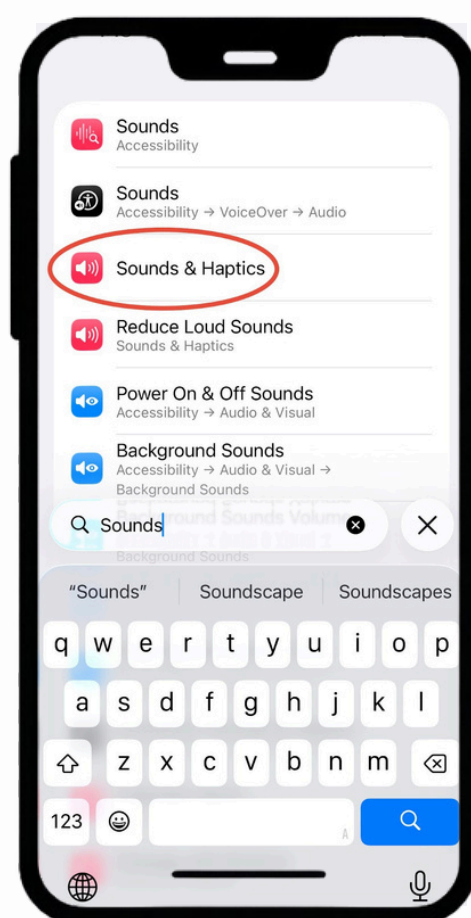
## Reduce Loud Sounds

This feature toggles on an audio limiter for your device. In other words, it caps loud audio spikes and sudden loud passages in your phone.

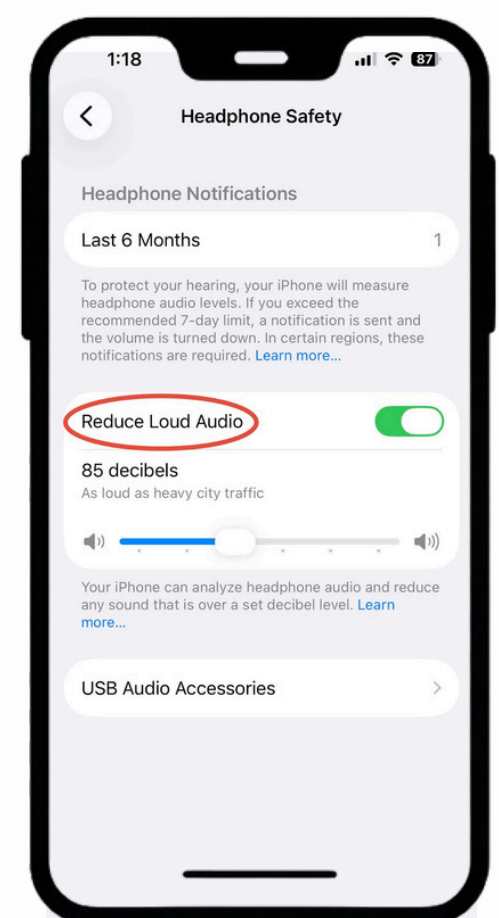
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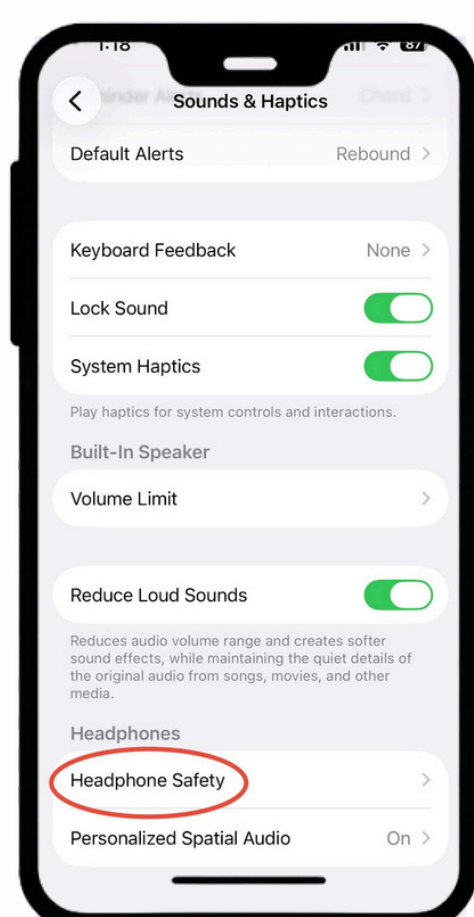
### 2. Search **Sound & Haptics**



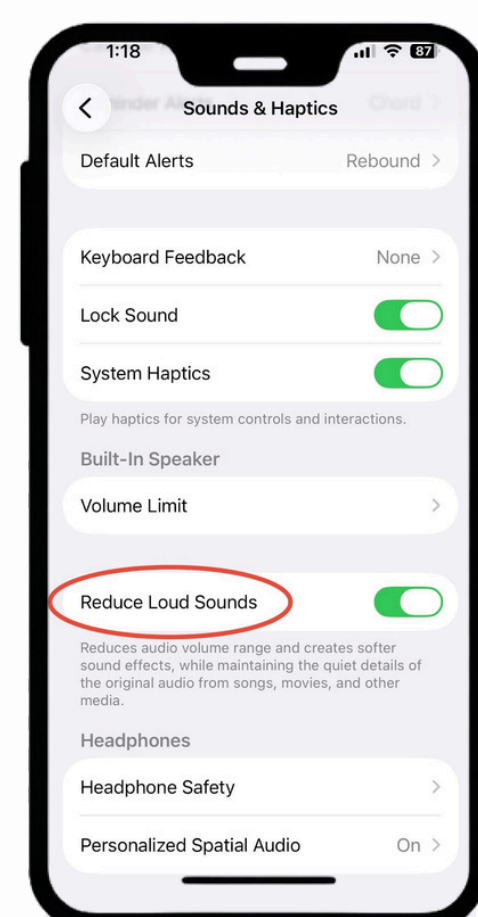
### 3. Toggle **Reduce Loud Audio** on



### 4. Click on **HeadPhone Safety**



### 5. Toggle On **Reduce Loud Audio**



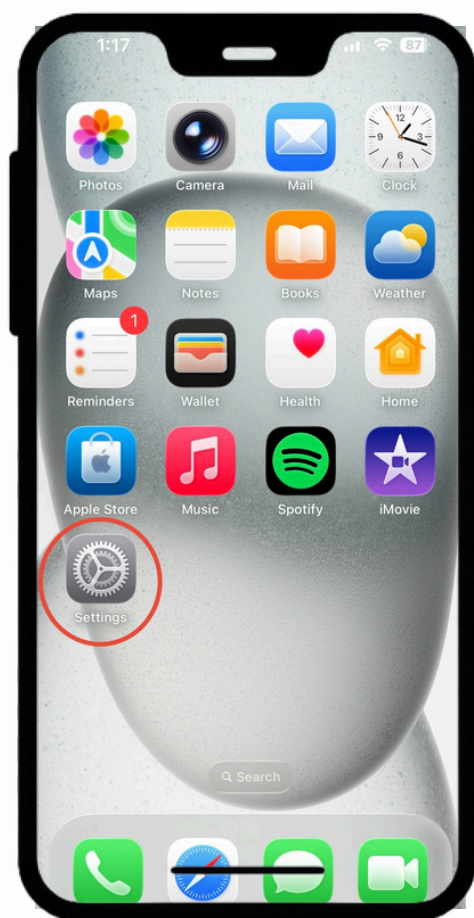
### 6. Set to your preferred Decibel level



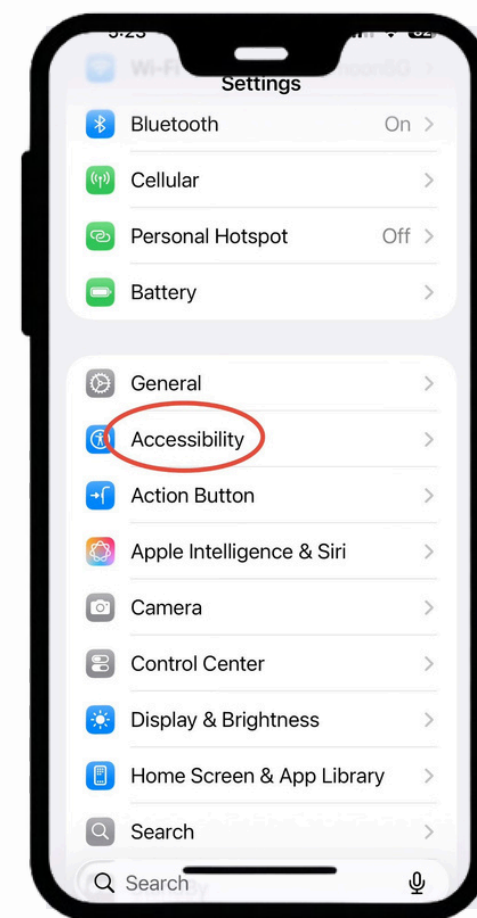
## HeadPhone Accommodations

This feature amplifies softer noises to balance between loud and quiet noises. This is not a volume limiter, but it allows softer noises to be heard without amplifying overall volume.

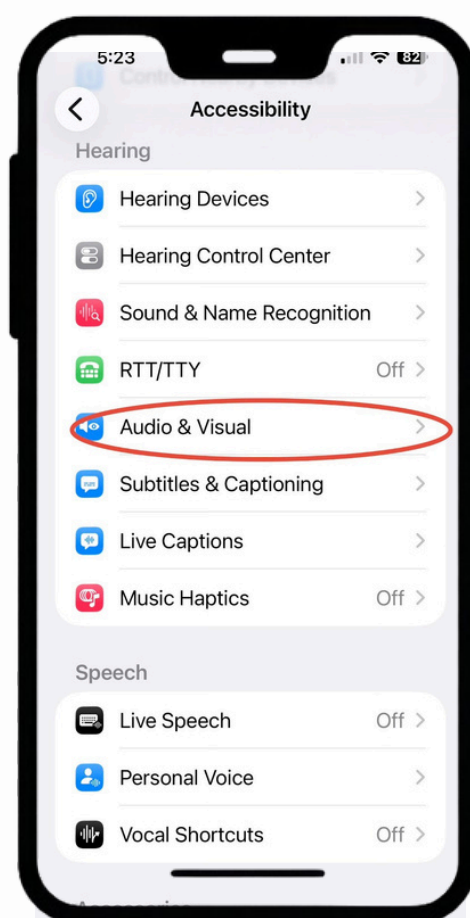
### 1. Go to the **Settings** App



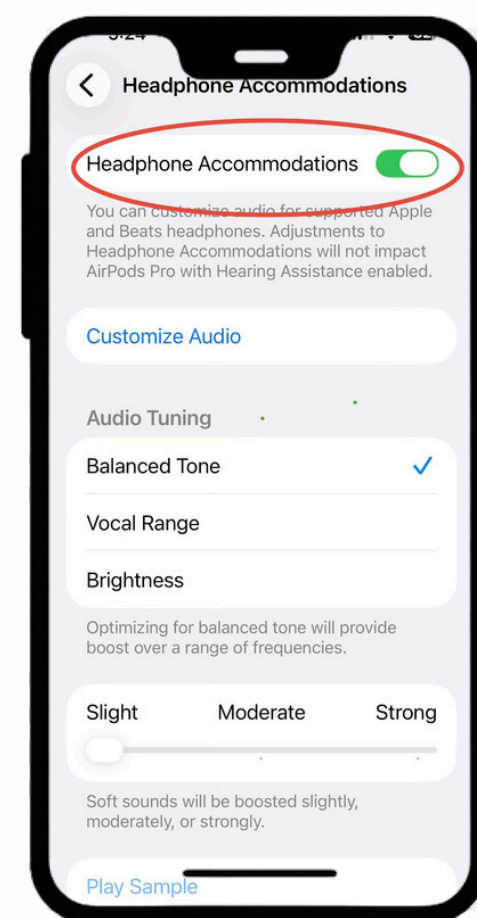
### 2. Search **Accessibility**



### 3. Click on **Audio & Visual**



### 4. Toggle **Headphone Accommodations**



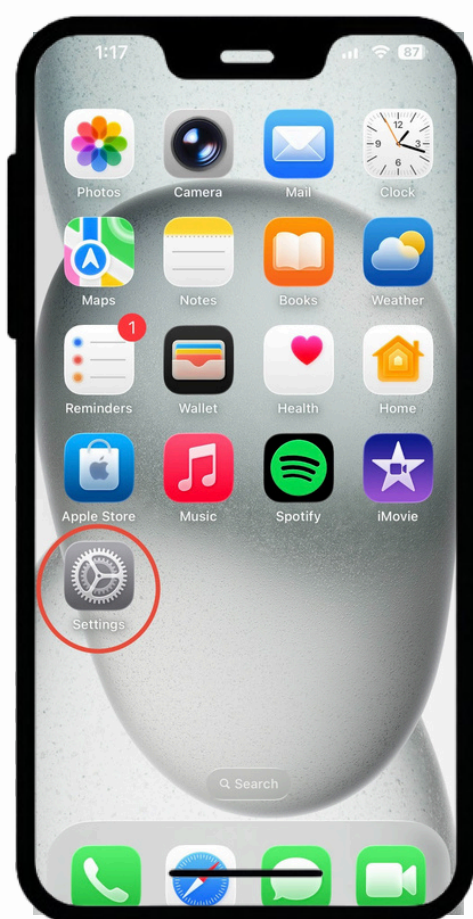
### 5. Set to your preferred level



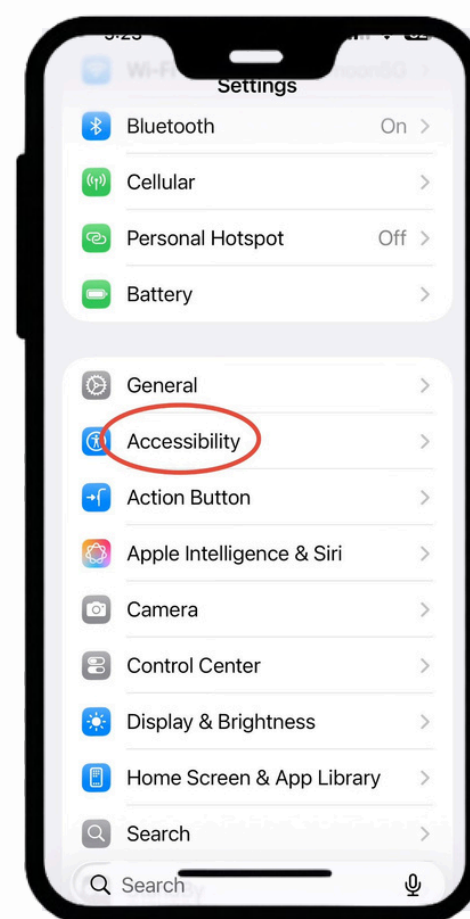
## Background Sounds

Plays ambient noises like rain, ocean, or forest noises. Could be used to mask sudden changes in audio by creating a gentle, constant sound. This does not mute the video or alter its volume, however.

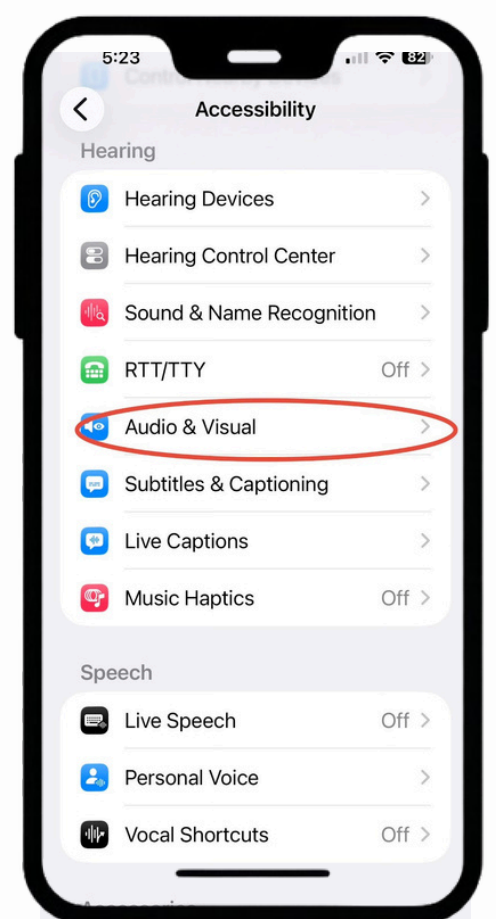
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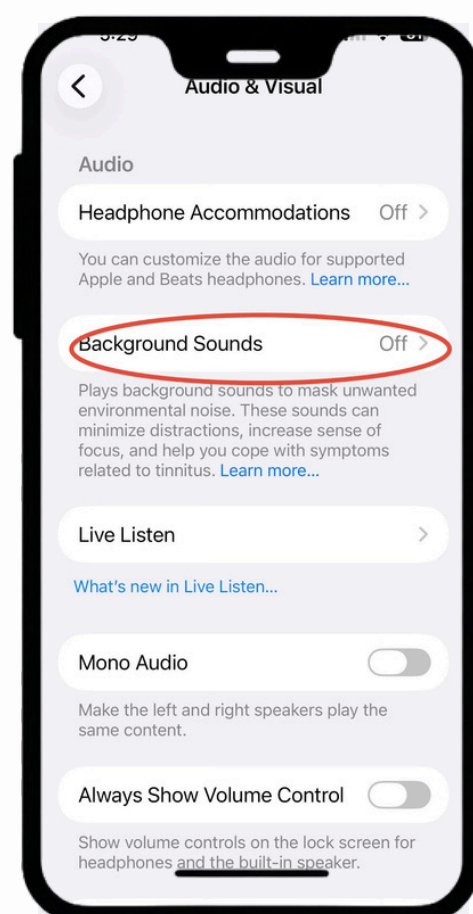
### 2. Search **Accessibility**



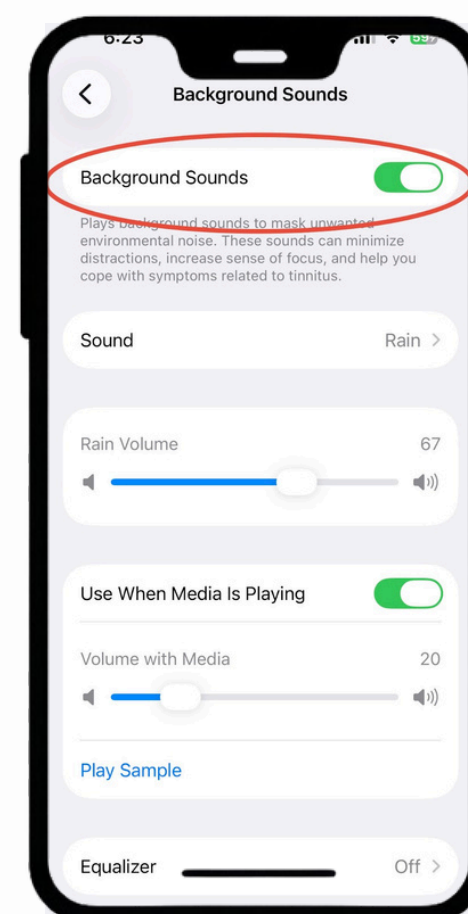
### 3. Click on **Audio & Visual**



### 4. Click on **Background Sounds**



### 5. Toggle On and Customize

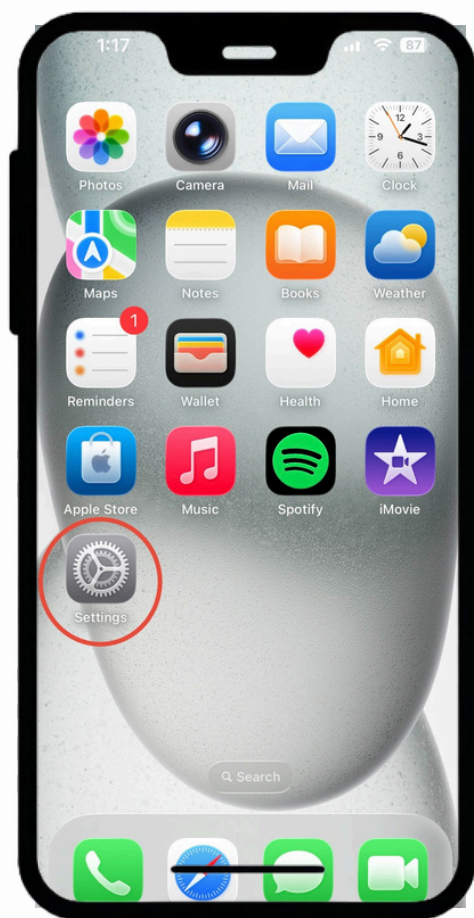




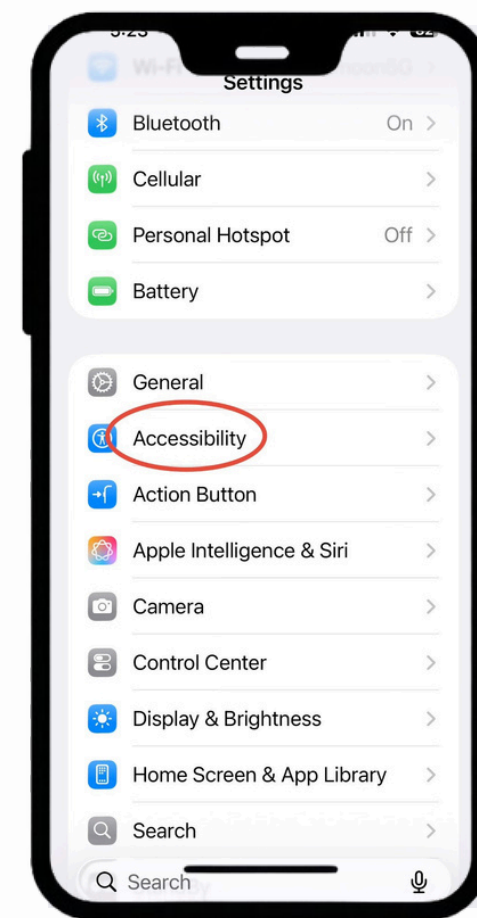
## Reduce White Point

Slides to tone down the intensity of bright colors on the screen. This dims extremely bright lights/colors on the screen.

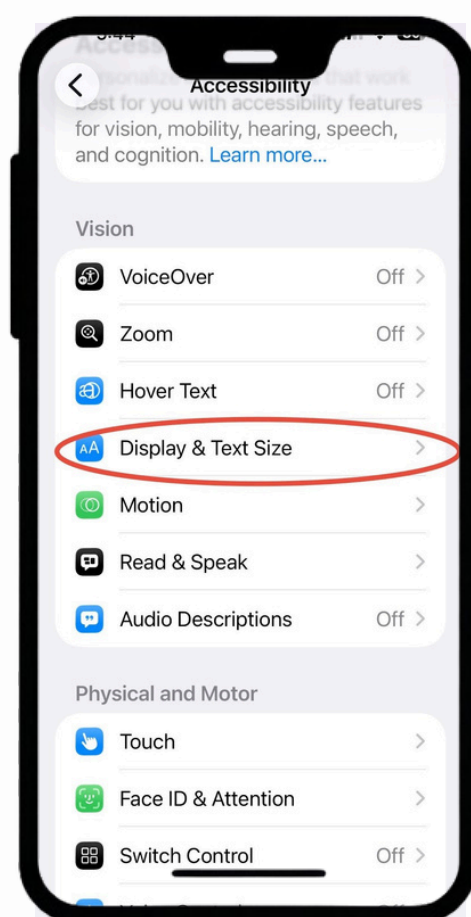
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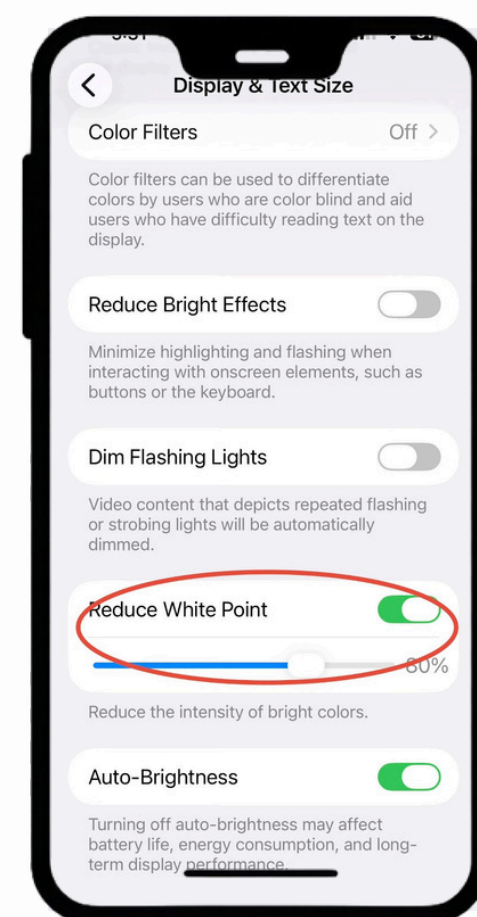
### 2. Search **Accessibility**



### 3. Click on **Display & Text Size**



### 4. Toggle on **Reduce White Point**

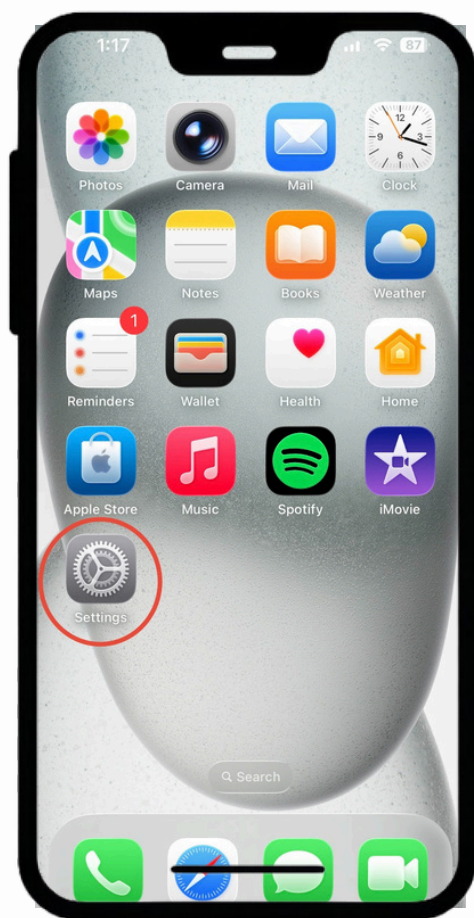




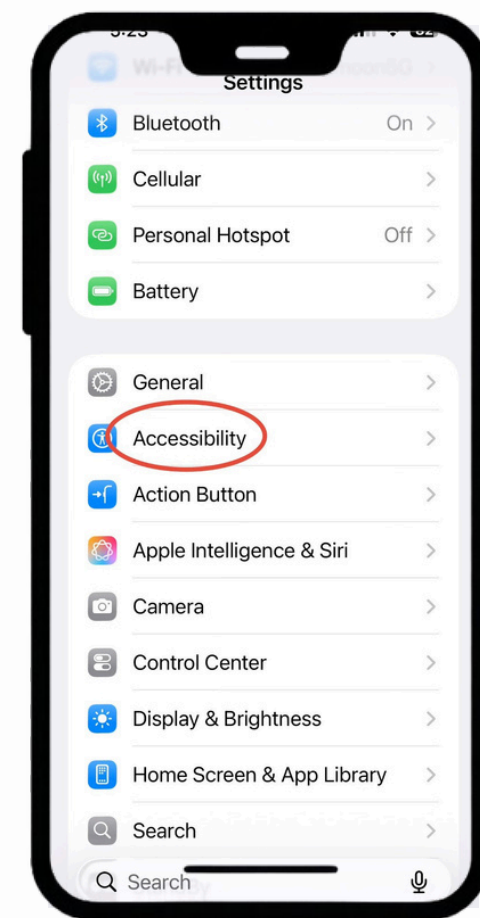
## Reduce Motion

Disables many UI animations, reducing system-induced motion. However, it does not affect video content.

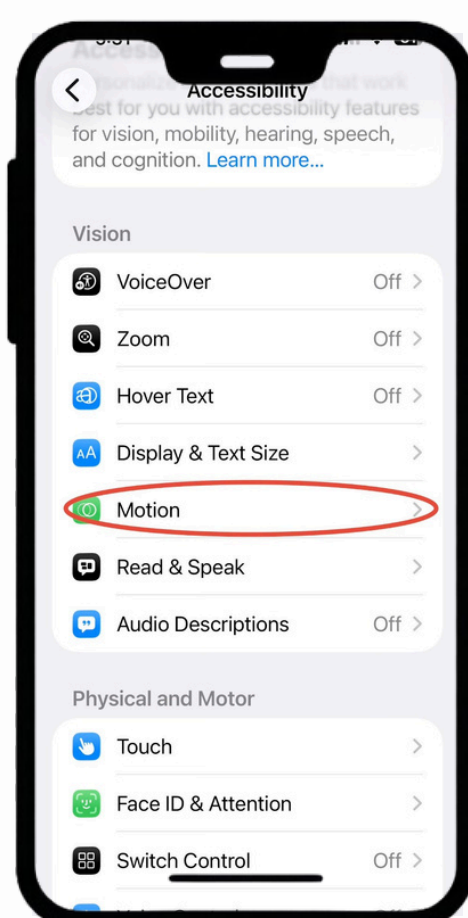
### 1. Go to the **Settings** App



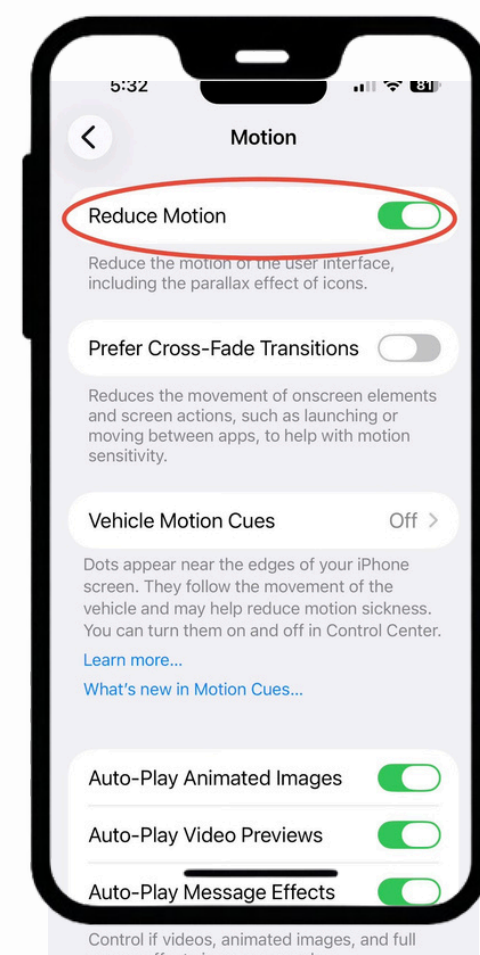
### 2. Search **Accessibility**



### 3. Click on **Motion**



### 4. Toggle on **Reduce Motion**

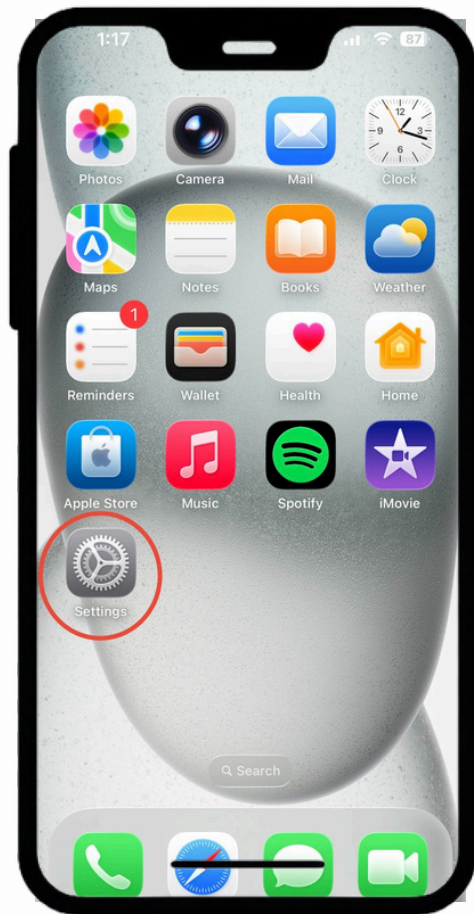




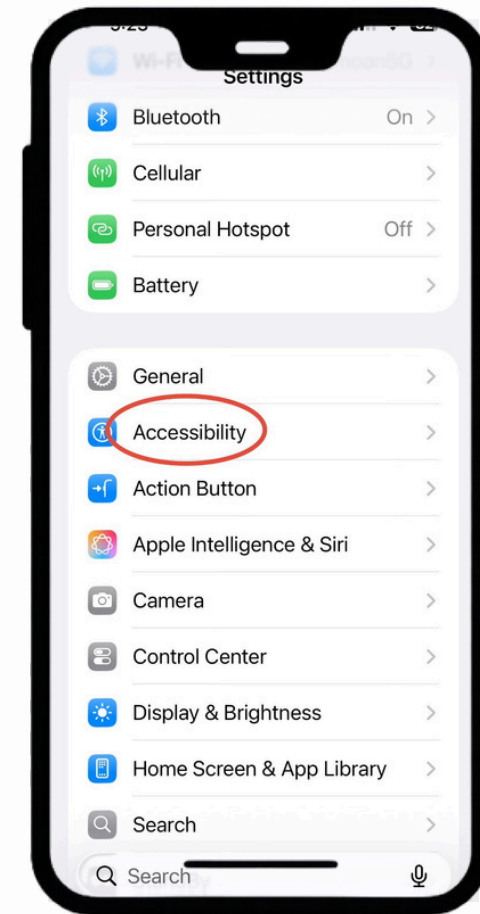
## Color filters (Grayscale)

This renders the whole screen gray, which removes color overstimulation completely. Usage should be if color stimulation is intense.

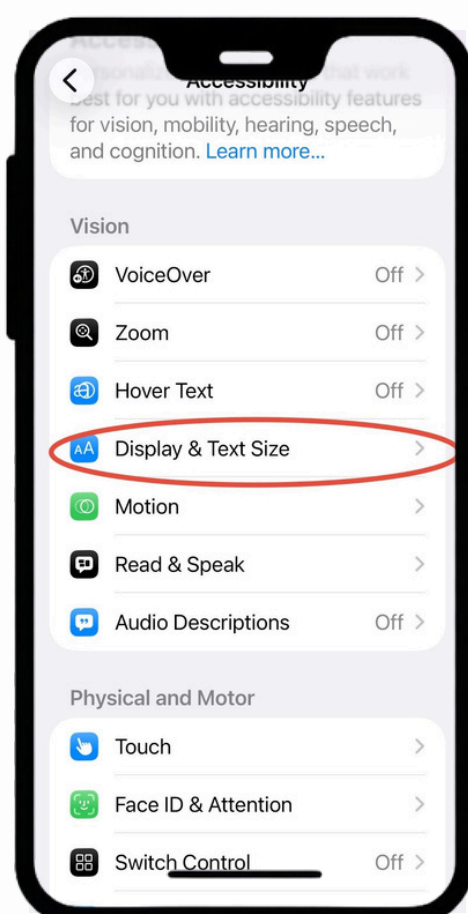
### 1. Go to the **Settings** App



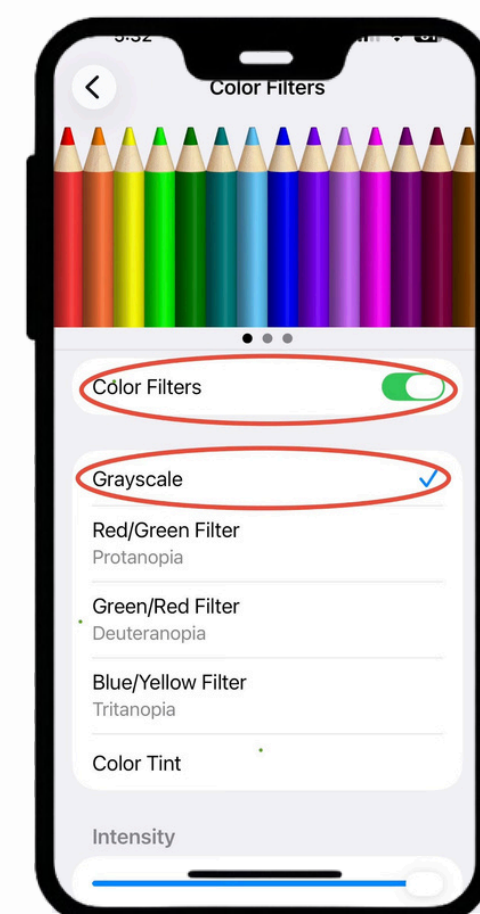
### 2. Search **Accessibility**



### 3. Click on **Display & Text Size**



### 4. Toggle on **Color Filters**



For more help, watch the video on the  
**Download** page



## Samsung / Android

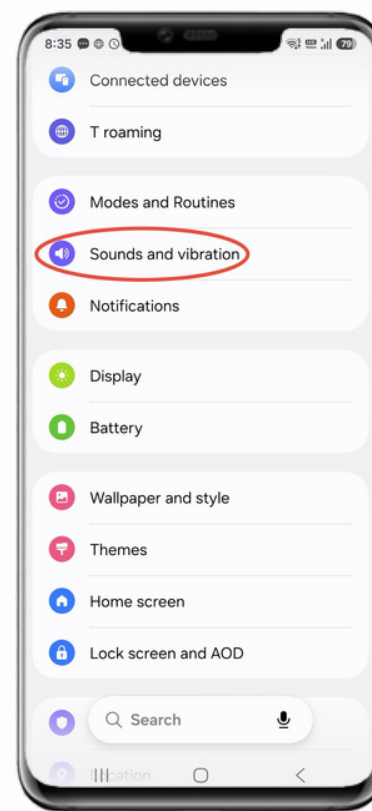
### Media Volume Limiter

Caps headphone volume at a set volume level. This feature prevents hearing loud sounds above the chosen threshold.

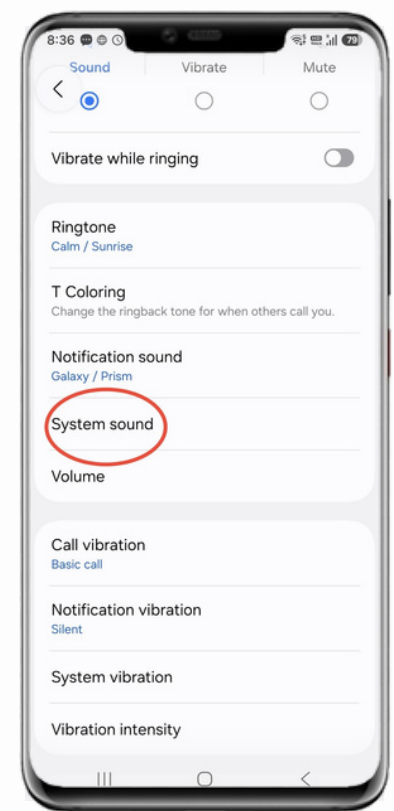
#### 1. Go to the **Settings** App



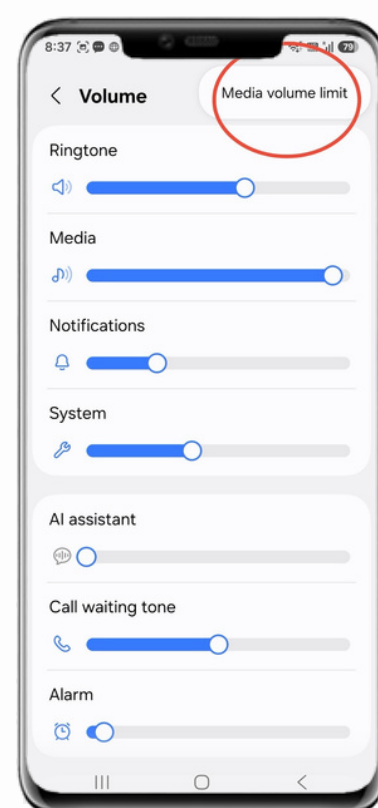
#### 2. Search for **Sounds and Vibrations**



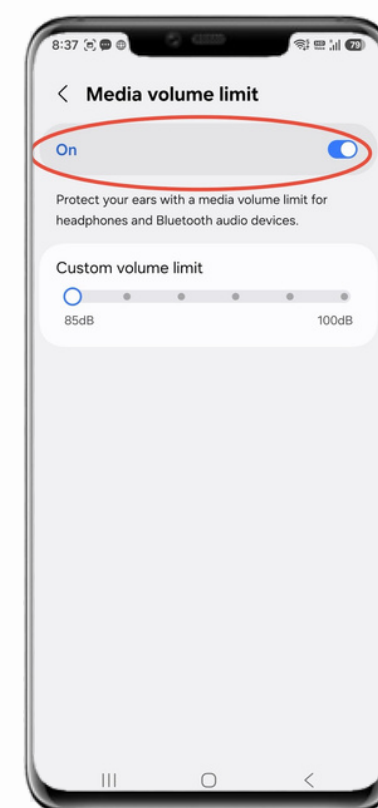
#### 3. Click on **System Sound**



#### 4. Click on **More Options**



#### 5. Toggle On **Media Volume Limit**





## Samsung / Android

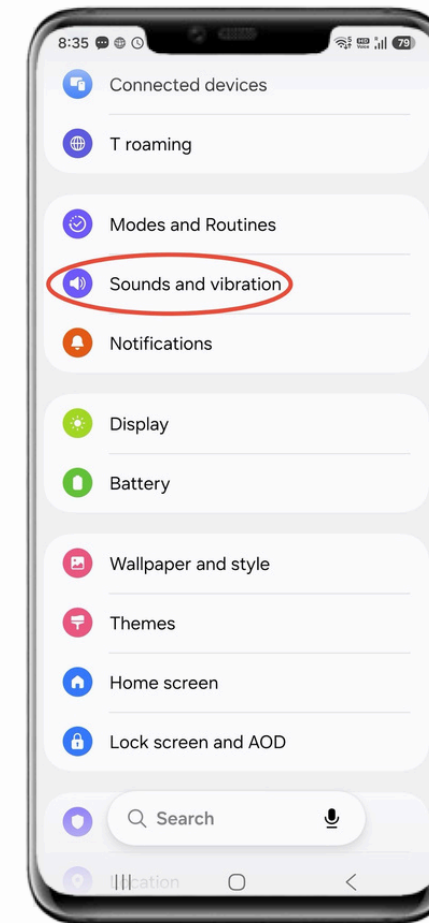
### Adapt Sound

Runs a hearing test that applies a personalized EQ profile, boosting frequencies that your child has trouble hearing. This can improve speech clarity but does not lower any peaks.

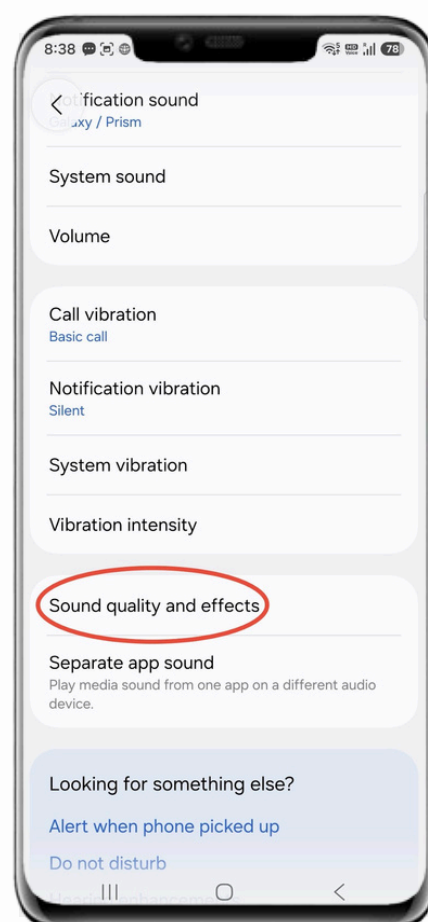
#### 1. Go to the **Settings** App



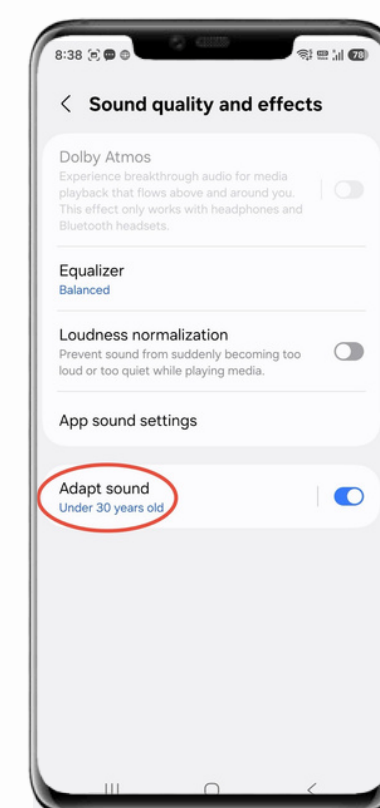
#### 2. Search for **Sounds and Vibrations**



#### 3. Click on **Sound Quality and Effects**



#### 4. Click on **Adapt Sound** and toggle it on





## Samsung / Android

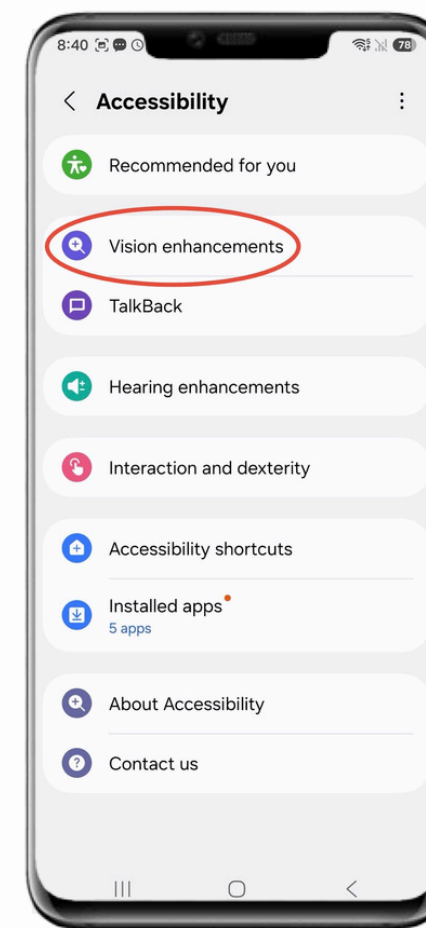
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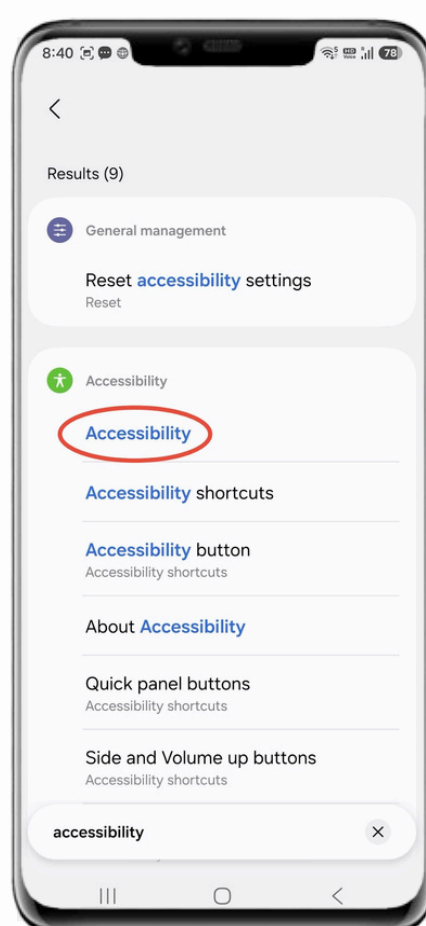
#### 1. Go to the **Settings** App



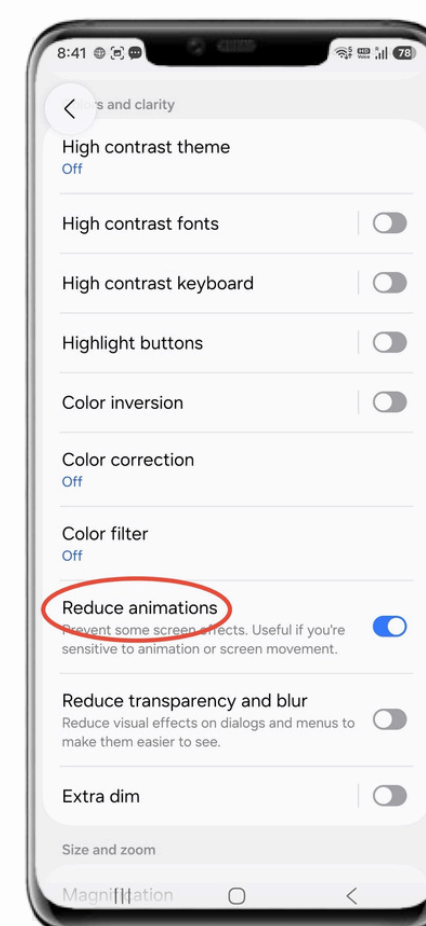
#### 2. Search for **Accessibility**



#### 3. Click on **Visibility enhancements**



#### 4. Toggle on **Remove Animations**





## Samsung / Android

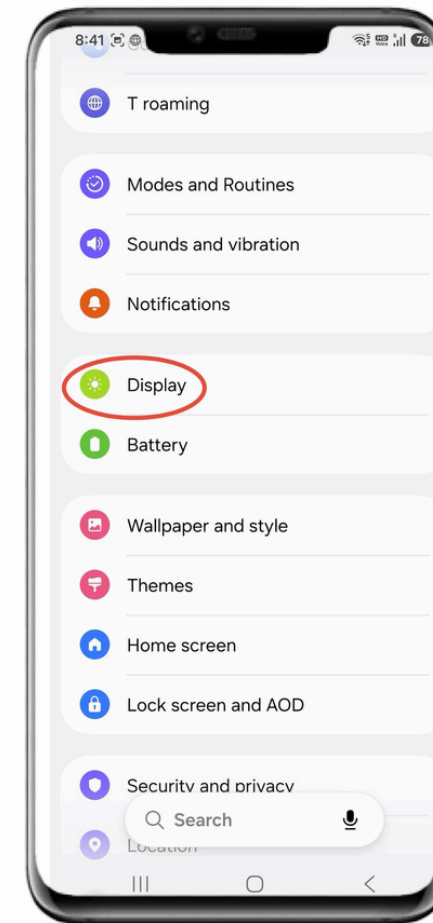
### Eye Comfort Shield

This feature tints the display yellow in order to cut blue light. This also offers “Enhanced comfort” that lowers contrast and color saturation that can reduce eye strain.

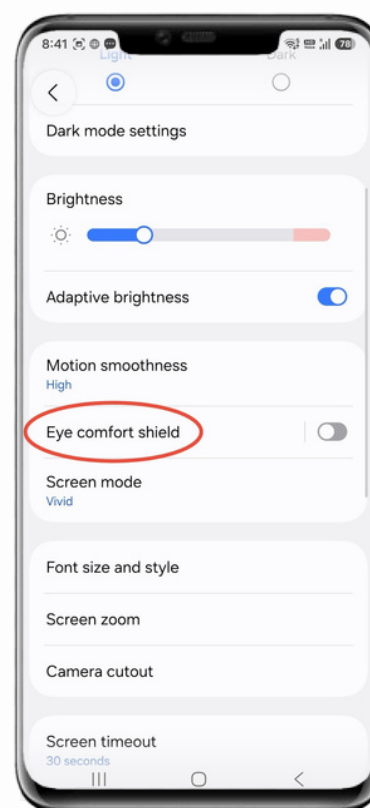
#### 1. Go to the **Settings** App



#### 2. Search for **Display**



#### 3. Turn on **Eye Comfort Shield**



# Pre-content checklist

You’ve already done the hard part. Use this quick and easy checklist to maintain your child’s sensory-safe environment!



## Iphone/IOS

- ☐ Is the volume capped to a limit?
- ☐ Is your child safe with headphones on?
- ☐ Are calming sounds playing?
- ☐ Is the motion reduced?
- ☐ Is the intensity of bright colors reduced?
- ☐ For intense sensitivity, are color filters on?

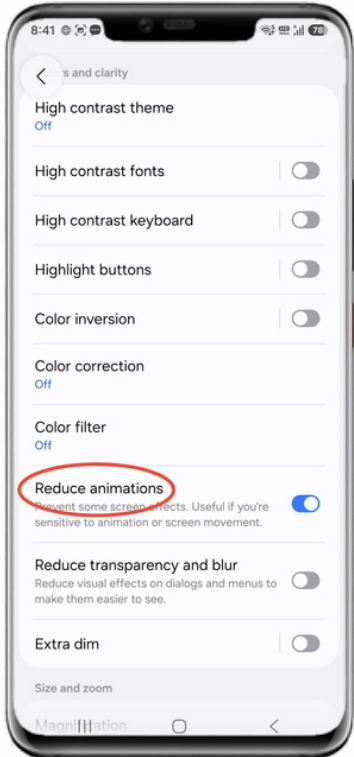


Reduce Loud Audio



## Samsung/Android

- ☐ Is the volume limited to a certain decibel?
- ☐ Are personalized EQ settings on?
- ☐ Is the UI motion removed?
- ☐ Is the screen tinted and protected?



Reduce Animations

## Pre-Screen Time routine

- ☐ Is the physical volume all the way down before watching?
- ☐ Is screen brightness adjusted to current lighting?
- ☐ Is there a clear, set time limit for the child?



# Frequently Asked Questions



Will changing these settings ruin the videos or make them boring for my child?

Not at all. These settings merely put a "ceiling" on the unexpected sensory spikes that videos contain. They do not change the content of the videos themselves, but can make them a little more sensory-friendly while still making them entertaining for your child.



Do these settings totally get rid of all the sensory issues in short-form content?

No. However, they can reduce the issues by capping some of their spikes that cause overload in the first place. Think of them like a "first line of defense" against overload. For full protection, designers themselves need to incorporate these features into the platforms themselves.



What if my child gets overwhelmed even after applying these settings?

While these settings reduce sensory triggers, screen fatigue exists. Try to limit your child's screen time more. If overstimulation persists, consider taking longer breaks between screen sessions or consulting an occupational therapist specializing in sensory stimuli.



My child is a teenager. Do these settings still help?

Absolutely. These platforms can be even more dangerous to developing minds, and these settings should be implemented whether your child is five or fifteen.



Why shouldn't I just ban short-form content entirely?

Screens are an important part of a child growing, especially now in 2026. Banning them entirely might create unnecessary friction and isolate them from their peers. By adjusting the settings, you can improve their digital environment significantly so your child can navigate the digital age on their own terms.

# In-App sensory settings

Social media can be harmful to children in many ways. Neurodivergent kids, even more. This one-page guide shows how to protect your child’s sensory peace—in less than five minutes.



## YouTube

Turn off Autoplay

Profile Picture → Settings→ Autoplay→ Toggle OFF.

Muted Feed Previews

Profile Picture → Settings→ General → Playback in feeds → Set to OFF



## Instagram

Less Sensitive Content

Profile → Menu → Content preferences → Sensitive content→ Select Less

Quiet Mode

Profile→Menu→Notifications→Quiet mode→Toggle ON and set hours



## TikTok

Restricted Mode

Profile→ Menu→Settings and privacy→Content preferences→ Restricted Mode→Turn ON.

Sound Filters

Profile→Menu→ Settings and privacy→Content preferences→ Filter video keywords→Add words/hashtags

## Congratulations! You've just taken a step in protecting your child's peace.



Thank you so much for taking the time to read and implement these settings to better protect your child from the dangers online. Now you have the knowledge and the tools to effectively combat short-form content.

## There's just one more step remaining.

There's a parent out there that might be dreading the next time their child goes online, blaming themselves for a neurological reaction that they don't know about. The autism community relies on knowledge, and you can be the one that gives a little bit of peace back. Help us change the way short-form content works. Here's how you can help:



### Drop it in the group chat

Text this toolkit link directly to other parents that might be struggling.



### Post it to the community

Share this mission in your local support networks, parent facebook groups, or anywhere that might help.



### Equip the Experts

Send this toolkit to your child's occupational therapist or special education teacher so they can pass it onto other families.