

Parental Tips: Screen Time



As children get older, too much screen time can interfere with activities like being physically active, doing homework, playing with friends and spending time with family. Too much screen time can also contribute to obesity, attention problems, sleep disorders and problems at school.

For secondary school age children, screen time can include things like researching a school project, creating music or art, or interacting with friends via social media. But it also can include less productive activities, like watching inappropriate TV shows, visiting unsafe websites or playing violent video games.

Some studies show that children spend almost 9 hours a day online, on the phone, watching TV, or playing games — so what is a parent to do?

Parents should continue to set limits on screen time, preview all shows and games to make sure they are OK and stay aware of what their children are doing online.



How Much Is Too Much?

It is recommended that parents of children 5 to 18 years old place consistent limits on the use of any media. This includes entertainment media (like watching TV and movies), as well as educational media (like creating flash cards on a smartphone app). Not all screen time is created equal. It is up to parents to decide how (and how often) their children use screens and whether screen time is positive or negative. For instance, time spent on homework or other educational activities might not need to be as restricted as time spent playing video games.



For children of all ages, screen time should not replace time needed for sleeping, eating, being active, studying and interacting with family and friends.

Screen Time Tips

The same parenting rules apply to screen time as to anything else — set a good example, establish limits and talk with your child about it. To make your child's screen time more productive:

1. Research video and computer games before letting your child have them. Look at the ratings which can run from 3 to 18 and display information about content. Teens should probably be limited to games rated 12.



2. Preview games and even play them with your child to see what they are like. The rating may not match what you feel is appropriate.

3. Make sure children have a variety of free-time activities, like spending time with friends and playing sports, which can help them develop a healthy body and mind.

4. Turn off all screens during family meals and at bedtime. Also, keep devices with screens out of your child's bedroom after bedtime, and don't allow a TV in your child's bedroom.

5. Treat screen time as a privilege that children need to earn, not a right that they are entitled to. Tell them that screen time is allowed only after chores and homework are done.

6. Spend screen time together to make sure that what your child sees is appropriate. Watch TV, play games, go online — use screen time together as a chance to interact and communicate.

7. Use screening tools on the TV, computers and tablets to block your child's access to inappropriate material.

8. Teach your child about Internet safety and social media smarts and make sure he or she knows the dangers of sharing private information online or sexting.

9. Keep the computer in a common area where you can watch what is going on.

