

SCREEN TIME AND CHILDREN - HOW TO GUIDE YOUR CHILD

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



distracting content, and violent media. Eliminate advertising on apps, since young children have trouble telling the difference between ads and factual information.

As your child grows, keep in mind that too much or poor quality screen time has been linked to:

- Obesity
- Irregular sleep schedules and shorter duration of sleep
- Behavioral problems
- Loss of social skills

Screens are everywhere. As a result, controlling a child's screen time has become much harder for parents. To complicate matters, some screen time can be educational for children as well as support their social development.

So how do you manage your child's screen time? Here's a primer on guiding your child's use of screens and media.

Screen time guidelines

The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages media use, except for video-chatting, by children younger than 18 to 24 months. If you want to introduce digital media to children ages 18 to 24 months, make sure it's high quality and avoid solo media use. For children ages 2 to 5, limit screen time to one hour a day of high-quality programming. As your child grows, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work as well. You'll need to decide how much media to let your child use each day and what types of media are appropriate.

The problems with screen time

Unstructured playtime is more valuable for a young child's developing brain than is electronic media. Despite the fact that many digital media programs claim to be educational, children younger than age 2 are more likely to learn and remember information from a live presentation than they are from a video.

By age 2, children can benefit from certain types of screen time, such as programming with music, movement and stories. However, passive screen time shouldn't replace reading, playing or problem-solving. Co-view with your child to help your child understand what he or she is seeing and apply it in real life.

Also, it's crucial to monitor the shows your child is watching and the games or apps he or she is playing to make sure they are appropriate. Avoid fast-paced programming, which young children have a hard time understanding, apps with a lot of

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- Violence
- Less time for play

Developing screen time rules

In recognition of how ever-present screens have become, the American Academy of Pediatrics recently held a symposium to share practical advice for parents. Experts noted that children are still doing the same things that they've always done - only now they are often doing them virtually. As a result, it makes sense for parents to apply the same rules to children's real and virtual environments. This means playing with your child, teaching kindness, being involved, and knowing your child's friends and what your child does with them.

The experts also suggested that the quality of the media your child is exposed to is more important than the platform or amount of time spent.

Ensuring screen time quality

Not all apps, online games or programs are created equal. To ensure quality screen time, consider these tips:

- Preview programs, games and apps before allowing your child to view or play with them.
- Seek out interactive options that engage your child, rather than those that just require pushing and swiping or staring at the screen.
- Use parental controls to block or filter internet content.
- Make sure your child is close by during screen time so that you can supervise his or her activities.

- Ask your child regularly what programs, games and apps he or she has played with during the day.
- Play a video game or explore a new app with your child.
- When watching programming with your child, discuss what you're watching and educate him or her about advertising and commercials.

Seek out information from organizations such as Common Sense Media to help you determine if a program, game or app is appropriate.

Remember that at some point your child will be exposed to content that you haven't approved beforehand and devices without internet filters. Talk to your child about the possible situations that could come up and the behavior you expect.

Setting the screen time limits for older children

Set reasonable limits for your child's screen time, especially if your child's use of screens is hindering his or her involvement in other activities. Consider these tips:

- Prioritize unplugged, unstructured playtime.
- Create tech-free zones or times, such as during mealtime or one night a week.
- Discourage use of media entertainment during homework.
- Set and enforce daily or weekly screen time limits and curfews, such as no exposure to devices or screens 1 hour before bedtime.
- Consider using apps that control the length of time a

child can use a device.

- Require your children to charge their devices outside of their bedrooms at night.
- Keep screens out of your child's bedroom.
- Limit your own screen time.
- Eliminate background TV.

Teaching appropriate behavior

Online relationships and social media have become a major part of adolescent life. Experts suggest that it's OK for your teen to be a part of these worlds - as long as he or she understands appropriate behavior. Explain to your teen what's OK and what's not OK, such as sexting, cyberbullying and sharing personal information online. Teach your child not to send or share anything online that he or she would not want the entire world to see for eternity. No matter how smart or mature you feel your child is, monitor his or her online and social media behavior.

Your child is bound to make mistakes using media. Talk to your child and help him or her learn from them. Also, model positive online etiquette yourself.

Managing your child's use of screens and media will be an ongoing challenge. But by developing household rules - and revisiting them as your child grows - you can help ensure a safe and fun experience.

Source: Mayo Clinic Staff
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/screen-time/art-20047952>