Screen Time

Many children and adults spend hours in front of a screen. They watch TV or videos, play games, send and receive text messages, use apps and social media, browse the Internet and more. This can be fun and, in some cases, educational, but make sure it doesn't take too much time from other activities or expose your child to harm.

What is wrong with too much screen time?

Too much screen time can:

- Take away from time talking and playing with family and friends
- Take the place of physical activity and lead to weight gain
- Interfere with developing a good self-concept and body image
- Affect reading skills
- Cause attention span problems
- Make violence look normal
- Expose children to adult behaviors, such as sex, alcohol, tobacco and drug use

Screen use tips

Limit screen time not related to school work (TV, videos, games and Internet) to one to two hours a day. Use a kitchen timer to help keep track of time.

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV for children under age 2. Choose activities that promote good brain growth, such as talking, playing, singing and reading.
- Involve your child in setting guidelines for choosing TV shows, games and computer activities. Use guides and ratings to help you, but beware of claims that a program is educational. Oftentimes, there is no evidence to back such claims.
- Keep the TV off and keep all screens away during meals.
- Set limits for texting and smartphone use, and keep mobile devices out of your child's bedroom at night.
- Set certain days as media-free, and plan other fun things to do.
- Avoid using the TV or other screen entertainment as a reward.
- Turn off the TV when a chosen program is over. Record shows to watch later, and skip the ads.
- Watch TV with your child. Talk about what you see and how problems can be solved without violence.
- Keep TVs and computers out of children's bedrooms. Keep them in a central place instead.
- Turn on the radio or listen to music or books on tape instead of looking at a screen.
- Be a good role model and limit your own screen use.

- If your family is trying to cut back on screen time, take small steps and make it clear to your child that it's not a punishment.
- Teach children the purpose of advertising. Talk about unrealistic messages in ads.
- On newer TVs (made after January 2000), use the V-chip to block out shows with sex and violence. If you have cable, use the cable company's parental control settings.
- Use the social media apps your child uses, and follow or friend them.
- Use a filter to block sites you don't want your child to see. However, these aren't foolproof – you still need to supervise.
- Explain that people your child may meet online are not always who they say they are. Tell your child that what they read may not be true and what they write may not be private.

Teach children to:

- Never use a credit card or give out personal information unless you say it's OK. This includes name, home address, phone number, age, race, family income, school name or address or friends' names.
- Never share their password, even with friends.
- Log out of social networking sites when away from the computer or mobile device.
- Never meet face to face with someone they "meet" online, unless a parent goes with them to a public place.
- Tell a parent or another adult if they get emails that make them feel uncomfortable. Never answer those emails.
- Never use bad language or send mean messages online.
- Never post or send photos that they wouldn't want their parents or teacher to see.
- Never copy information and claim it's their own or copy software unless it is clearly marked "free."
- Know what kinds of sites you allow and why. Make sites off-limits if they are obscene, pornographic, violent, hate-filled, racist or offensive in other ways.
- Understand that nothing online is ever truly private.

To Learn More

- **www.commonsensemedia.org**
- **www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/default.aspx**
- **www.maketvwork.com**
- **www.seattlechildrens.org**
- **Your child's healthcare provider**

Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call Marketing Communications at 206-987-5205.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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