

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

Media use guidelines by age

For children younger than 18 months, avoid use of media other than video-chatting. If parents want to introduce media for children ages 18 to 24 months, select high-quality apps your child can interact with and use them with your child. Rather than using screens, choose activities that promote good brain growth, such as talking, playing, singing and reading.

Limit screen time to 1 hour per day for children ages 2 to 5. Choose high-quality media and view or play it with your child when possible. Avoid fast-paced programs and apps. Slower-paced content used along with an adult might help children learn.



Children ages 6 and older benefit from consistent limits on time spent using media and guidance with choosing media. Allow plenty of time for active play, sleep, interacting with peers, homework and time with family.

Visit HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan to create a family media use plan that is right for your family.

Screen use tips

- 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.
- Use the social media apps your child uses, and follow or friend them.
- Keep the TV off and keep all screens away during meals.
- Avoid using screens 1 hour before bedtime and keep mobile devices out of your child's bedroom at night.
- Keep TVs and computers out of children's bedrooms. Keep them in a central place instead.

Screen Time

- Set certain blocks of time or days as media-free, and plan other fun things to do.
 - Avoid using screen entertainment as a reward or as a way to calm or soothe a child.
 - Turn off the TV when a chosen program is over. Record shows to watch later, and skip the ads.
 - Watch or use media with your child. Talk about what you see and how problems can be solved without violence.
 - Use a kitchen timer or app to set limits on screen time.
 - Listen to music, books on tape or podcasts 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 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 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 or send may not be private.
- 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 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 messages that make them feel uncomfortable. Never answer those messages.
 - 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.
 - Set strong privacy and security settings and understand that nothing online is ever truly private.

Teach children to:

- Never use a credit card or give out personal information unless you say it's OK. This

To Learn More

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

Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call Marketing Communications at 206-987-5323.

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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