

Screen Time and Children

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Children and adolescents spend a lot of time watching screens, including smartphones, tablets, gaming consoles, TVs, and computers. On average, children aged 8-18 in the United States spend 7 1/2 hours a day watching or using screens. While screens can entertain, teach, and keep children occupied, overuse or inappropriate content can lead to problems.

Parents may not always know what their children are viewing, or how much time they are spending with screens.

- Violence, self-harm, and suicide
- Videos of stunts or challenges that may inspire unsafe behavior
- Sexual content
- Negative stereotypes
- Substance use
- Cyberbullies and predators
- Advertising aimed at your child
- Misleading or inaccurate information

Too much screen time may lead to:

- Sleep problems
- Lower grades in school
- Reading fewer books
- Less time with family and friends
- Not enough outdoor or physical activity
- Weight problems
- Mood problems
- Poor self-image and body image issues
- Fear of missing out
- Less time learning other ways to relax and have fun

Managing a child's screen time is challenging for families. Your child is never too young for a screen-time plan.

Consider the following as a guideline:

- Until 18 months of age limit screen use to video chatting along with an adult (for example, with a parent who is out of town).
- Between 18- and 24-months screen time should be limited to watching educational programming with a caregiver.
- For children 2-5, limit non-educational screen time to about 1 hour per weekday and 3 hours on the weekend days.
- For ages 6 and older, encourage healthy habits and limit activities that include screens.
- Turn off all screens during family meals and outings.
- Learn about and use parental controls.
- Avoid using screens as pacifiers, babysitters, or to stop tantrums.
- Turn off screens and remove them from bedrooms 30-60 minutes before bedtime.

Screens are here to stay and can offer many positives. It's never too early to discuss screen media habits and experiences as a family. Let your children share their ideas and concerns. Some additional tips to keep in mind are:

- Carefully consider if your child is mature enough before allowing access to a new device (e.g., a gaming console or smartphone).
- Familiarize yourself with the content your child sees, to make sure it is age-appropriate.
- Talk to your child about what they are seeing. Point out good behavior, such as cooperation, friendship, and concern for others. Make connections to meaningful events or places of interest.
- Be aware of advertising and how it influences choices.
- Encourage your child to engage in other activities that do not involve screens, such as sports, music, art, and hobbies.
- Set a good example with your own healthy screen habits.
- Teach children about online privacy and safety.
- Encourage using screens in ways that build creativity and connection with family and friends.
- Consider your child or teen's maturity and habits. The right plan for one family may not be a good fit for another.
- www.common sense media.org
- www.healthy children.org (from the American Academy of Pediatrics)