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Ways Families Can Manage Screen Time

Screen Time: How Much is Ok?

This is now one of the biggest parenting challenges – managing this question. Much of the answer depends on the type of screen time, the personality and age of the child, and the response the child elicits when asked to turn off gaming as well as many other factors.

It can be helpful to identify how screen time will contribute to a balanced life. A positive way to answer this is to focus on balance and priorities rather than on the specific amount of time. Have a conversation with your child to get him involved in setting up the guidelines. They are more likely to follow guidelines if they help create them:

- Ask "what are two things you'd like to accomplish this summer"?
- Are there new skills like video editing or creating music you may be interested in learning? (ie. Garage Band, IMovie)
- What are activities of interest that do not include electronics – make a list.
- Schedule screen free days to plan activities with family, alone or with friends.
- Identify homework to be scheduled and worked on daily.
- Determine daily activities that are expected to be accomplished before electronic usage.
- Schedule daily outdoor play and exercise time. Outdoor play earns screen play.
- Make a Screen Time Check Off Chart for kids to check off the daily expectations.
- Have summer projects – learning to cook, building or creating something.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has a program to help families make wise media choices: Family Media Planner. https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx

For young children, delay access to electronics. The longer the child goes without electronics, the more time the child has to develop the important developmental skills during the critical years of development such as language, attention, concentration, close relationships and empathy. Many well- meaning parents provide electronics to children to provide an educational edge, this type of play can actually reduce the abilities parents are using electronics for.

Ways to Manage Screens/Sample Home Rules:

1. Identify <u>screen free times or electronic blackouts</u>, i.e. No screens during dinner.
2. Identify <u>screen free places</u>: Keep bedrooms and other non-supervised areas screen free.
3. Allow screens in kitchen or main living areas only.
4. Homework and family expectations completed before powering on.

5. Phones & tablets handed in before bed.
6. Have a family computer work station in a public place in your home to monitor for appropriate activity and viewing.
7. Make a list of alternate activities children can do instead of electronics, i.e. Legos, crafts, board games, sports, reading ...
8. Match screen time with outdoor/free play activity/exercise to teach and maintain balance.

Differentiate between the different types of screen time:

- **Passive** – Includes listening to music, watching tv and movies – often this type can include the family.
- **Interactive** - Gaming and social media is interactive and should be monitored.
- **Communication/Social Media**- Kids/teens want to stay connected to their friends. They see this means as a vital way of belonging to a group.
- **Content Creation/Making Digital Art**: Creating movies thru iMovie, writing music thru Garage Band. These medias can be an avenue to encourage creativity and innovation.

Monitor for signs of ESS (Electronic Screen Syndrome)

Symptoms include: irritability, quick emotional responses, rages, over focus on screens, lack of focus in other areas, social/emotional dysregulation, sleep disturbances and social anxiety.

Electronics become excessive when it stops kids from:

- Getting enough exercise and outdoor time
- Spending quality time in face to face interactions
- Getting a healthy amount of sleep
- Positive interactions and time spent with family
- Having down time to "just be"

Treat screens as a privilege not as a right. Privileges are earned. When your child fails to live up expectations associated with a privilege, the privilege should be removed until willingness to adhere to expectations is achieved. Screen time is earned when homework and family activities are completed.

Follow your child's accounts – especially tweens: This is the time developmentally when a tween feels "more is better"; they want 120K friends and followers; they may overdo friendships, attachments and overdo time spent on social media. *Their frontal lobe does not have the skills needed to keep them safe and self-monitor.*

Nothing is really private in the digital world. Help them be safe and learn to use technology and provide guidance when needed. With social media, mistakes and failures are often over focused on spread like wildfire causing intense emotions and social rejection. Teach them that anything posted will be seen and posted by the exact people they would not want to see the post.

Avoid screen multitasking – one electronic at a time.
Let your child be bored. Being bored elicits creativity and imagination. Have a timer to limit technology. We all can easily become time blinded.

Encourage face to face interactions with peers: Organizing get togethers reinforces authentic relationships. Tweens and teens are wired to socialize – encourage this and help them plan. Too little face to face peer interaction rewires the brain to focus on the utilized pathways and under-developing the social pathways needed for successful one on one interaction.

Minimize screen time after sun down. The blue light from technology suppresses melatonin which is the natural chemical our body produces to promote sleep. Kids who stay up too late using technology are becoming wired and tired. Interactive screen time should end two (2) hours prior to bed and passive can be thirty (30) minutes before bed.

Be the Model You Want Your Child to Be: Children learn from their parents. Kids won't respect the rules if parents aren't leading by example. When a child sees the parent put the phone down or not answer a call at dinner, the child learns to respect the rules. Do what you are asking your child to do.

Gaming:

➢ Pervasive in children and teens and can be a major venue for developing friendships.
➢ Advances and Apps make it possible for our kids to interact with others all over the word.
This mode of group play is more accessible than face to face play.
➢ On-line friendships fill holes in social connection for kids who may have unique interests, live in remote areas and provide kids with social anxieties a sense of control and confidence.
➢ A high percentage of kids (mainly boys) report having friendships with their gaming friend. They also report being cyberbullied and exposed to disturbing trash talking.
➢ Alarmingly, kids also report disclosing personal content info on line exposing them to predators.
➢ This is a new way of developing friendships that is becoming more and more common.
For parents, these friendships can be alarming as parents do not have opportunities to meet these on line friends as they would real life friends.
➢ Kids can develop idealized perceptions with these peers as they are not seeing the peer in everyday life.
➢ Parents Should:
1. Monitor gaming friendships by listening to the on line conversations.
2. Set up gaming systems in main area of the house to monitor.
3. Have child only play with peers he already knows in real life.
4. Disable chat functions.
5. *Teach kids that gaming friends are still strangers in real life.*