

FAMILY WELLNESS

Empowering healthy limits to screen time

- What the research says
- Setting family limits
- Resources to make it easier



How much screen time is "too much" screen time? Balancing screen use to protect growing brains.

Research is mounting on the impact of screens on all of us--young and old. However there is no denying that screens are a vital and unavoidable part of modern day life. It becomes an important balancing act to find an appropriate amount of screen time for the children in your care.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, and other organizations tell us that too much screen time makes children irritable, impulsive, and can cause them to struggle academically. Their suggested limits are:

Children ages birth to two years old:

Very limited screen time, like for video calls with loved ones. No screen time that isn't interactive (i.e. watching TV).

Children ages two to five:

Limited, high quality screen time while interacting with an adult or peer, about 30-60 minutes a day or less.

Children ages five and up:

Screen time less than two hours a day.

Setting Limits

Collaborate to set limits that are realistic for all

The recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics may seem unrealistic for your family. If so, it's important to consider and set attainable limits, keeping your unique patterns and needs in mind. It's also important to differentiate with children the difference between

"Academic Screen Time" and "Recreational Screen Time."

Academic Screen Time includes things like virtual schooling, homework, and screen usage while at school. Generally, children have no control over this amount. Recreational Screen Time would be everything else--social media use, watching TV, and playing video games, for example. This is the amount of screen time that can be changed. Unfortunately, school aged children often spend upwards of

five hours of their school day with academic screen time, which is why it is important to encourage recreational time away from screens as much as is feasible for your family.

When setting family limits, begin by sharing the downsides of screen time with your children, including eye strain, brain development impacts, sleep challenges, and the inherent lack of physical activity while in front of a screen--check the resource section to the right for child-appropriate information to share. Next, create goals for the whole family--adults too!--to cut down on recreational screen usage. If your children are old enough, include them in this process by asking them what a realistic goal might be. Start small, and work towards where you'd like the family screen usage to be. Finally, create new and exciting alternatives to screen time. This could be family walks, trips to the park, new board games or active toys.

After making changes, invite the family to reflect on the differences they have noticed. Are we less irritable with each other? Have we been able to have fun in new ways? Do we miss the extra screen time or did we find that it wasn't as important as we thought it would be? Reflecting on the positive outcomes will make it easier to stick to the limit.

"Yes, kids love technology. But they also love legos, scented markers, handstands, books, and mud puddles. It's all about balance."

– K.G., FIRST GRADE TEACHER

Resources

Support the Changes

- Learn about how [screens affect brains](#)
- Use this tool to create a [Family Media Agreement](#)
- Share with children what the [possible negative effects](#) of too much screen time are.
- [Find an app](#) to help monitor screen time use
- View the powerful ABC News Special: [SCREEN TIME with Diane Sawyer](#)
- Find more tips to bring screen time down to 2 hours a day or less at our [5-4-3-2-1 Go! ® website](#)

