



# Screen Time & Activity

## finding the balance

### Educators

While technology is a useful and increasingly important part of our lives, the amount of time that children spend with technology has become a national concern.

### What is screen time?

Screen time is prevalent in the lives of children and teens. From traditional TVs to computer games, laptops and handheld devices, screens dominate children's lives in their play and increasingly in their school life. Screen time tends to be a sedentary activity, when kids are physically inactive.

To maximize learning and development, it is critical for parents and educators to determine when and how to limit screen time. Too much screen time has been shown to lead to weight gain and poor grades.

### So how long is too long?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting children's total screen time to no more than one to two hours per day. For children younger than 2 years, screen time is discouraged altogether.

### What happens when a child spends too much time in front of screens?

Too much screen time can:

- Make it hard to sleep at night or concentrate during the day
- Increase risk of attention problems, anxiety and depression
- Increase risk of becoming overweight because it reduces time for physical activity, promotes poor diets and provides more opportunities for unhealthy snacking, particularly during TV viewing

### Data

- Children ages 8–18 spend over seven hours a day consumed by screens<sup>1</sup> — an increase of 2.5 hours in the past decade.
- According to the Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)<sup>2</sup>, half of all high school students spent three or more hours per school day watching TV, playing video games, or using the computer for fun.
- Children need at least 60 minutes of active and vigorous play each day.
- More than a third of American children are overweight or obese, leading to diseases formerly reserved for the middle aged and costing society \$14 billion in direct medical costs and approximately \$19,000 per overweight child in their lifetime (AAP).

## What can educators do?

Most children watch television before and after attending child care or school. Limiting or eliminating screen time in the child care setting and after school programs can help families come closer to meeting the recommended goal of less than two hours of screen time daily. Work with parents about the importance of limiting screen time and help model those behaviors in your program or classroom.

### Develop policies on the use of screens and technology

Schools, child care centers, and after-school programs can create policies that limit recreational screen time, and are also excellent venues for rolling out screen time reduction programs.

### Make intentional decisions about technology

If you use technology in the classroom, recognize what you hope to accomplish with it.

### Encourage active games

Active games such as listening and moving to music, marching, jumping and other creative play helps foster interaction and improve brain development.

### Learn how technology can affect children's development and learning

Children's exposure to screens at home and elsewhere will influence their classroom learning and behavior.<sup>3</sup>

### Work closely with parents to educate them about media management:

- Research tells us that developing children thrive when they are talked to, read to, and played with, including time for creative play, physically active play, and interactions with other children and adults. And there is no research showing the benefits of introducing children to new technologies in the first years of life.
- The Vermont Department of Health recognizes the growing use of technology that contributes to increased screen time, including school time instruction. However, reducing screen time can help prevent childhood obesity.
- Parents may not realize what their child's total screen time is. Suggest they start monitoring it and talk to their child about the importance of sitting less and moving more. Also, parents should explain screen time rules – and the consequences of breaking them.
- Screen time can be habit-forming: the more time children engage with screens, the harder time they have turning them off as they become older children.
- Screens can get in the way of moving, learning and spending time interacting with peers and family members. This is an important time for children to develop the skills they need to grow.

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#### References:

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3. Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, Alliance for Childhood, & Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment. Facing the Screen Dilemma: Young children, technology and early education. <http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/FacingtheScreenDilemma.pdf> October 2012. Date Accessed April 5, 2016.