Screen Time & Activity
finding the balance

Parents

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 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 your 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[1] — an increase of 2.5 hours in the past decade.

- According to the Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)[2], 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).

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What can parents do?

Have the discussion during medical visits

Medical professionals, given their status and knowledge can, just by asking about media usage, create awareness and perhaps engage in a discussion about family habits. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends pediatricians ask at least two questions, "How much recreational screen time does your child or teenager consume daily?" and "Is there a TV set or an internet-connected electronic device in the child's or teenager's bedroom?"

Set limits

Pay attention to how much screen time children are getting; you may be surprised at how many hours it actually is! Talk to them and set limits on use.

Turn it off and get moving

Identify non-screen activities both indoors and outdoors that everyone might enjoy. Ride a bike, go for a walk, or play a game inside.

Turn off TV during mealtime

Try to eat at the table with your family and not in front of the TV.

Keep TVs and computers out of your child's bedroom

Keep devices in the living room or kitchen to limit children's use.

Lead by example

Monitor your own screen time. Parents are the most important role model for their children.

Designate 'Screen-Free' days

Pick a day of the week where you and your family go without screens.

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References:
1. Kaiser Family Foundation. Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year Olds. Kaiser Family Foundation. http://kff.org/other/event/generation-m2-media-in-the-lives-of/. January 20, 2010. Date accessed April 5. 2016.

2. Vermont Department of Health. 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Vermont Department of Health. http://healthvermont.gov/research/yrbs/2015/index.aspx . January 2016. Date accessed April 5, 2016.