

How Much is Too Much Screen Time? Finding the Balance of Technology in Your Home

Presented by:

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Positive Youth Development Parent
Meeting

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Setting Family Screen Time Rules

Children are still doing the same things that they've always done — only now they are often doing them virtually. As a result, it makes sense for parents to apply the same rules to children's real and virtual environments. This means playing with your child, teaching kindness, being involved, and knowing your child's friends and what your child does with them.

The experts also suggested that the quality of the media your child is exposed to is more important than the platform or amount of time spent.

When determining appropriate screen time, consider your family values (e.g. mealtimes, family time, bed time) and your child's daily routines, activities, and necessities (e.g. school, sleep, after school activities, homework).

Developing a Family Media Plan can help your family utilize media and screen time in a thoughtful and appropriate way.

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media>

Managing Screen Time

It's still a good idea to set reasonable limits for your child's screen time, especially if your child's use of screens is hindering his or her involvement in other activities. Consider these tips:

- Prioritize unplugged, unstructured playtime.
- Create tech-free zones or times, such as during mealtime or one night a week.
- Set and enforce daily or weekly screen time limits and curfews.
- Consider using apps that control the length of time a child can use a device.
- Require your children to charge their devices outside of their bedrooms at night.
- Keep screens out of your child's bedroom.
- Limit your own screen time.
- Eliminate background TV.

(www.mayoclinic.org - "Screen Time and Children - How to Guide Your Child")

Apps to Help Parents Manage Screen Time:

Parent-Child Interaction with Screen Time

Using media can be a highly rewarding and positive experience. Engaging in media with your child can teach them to use it to learn, be creative and connect with others in their community and around the world. To support positive parent-child interaction with media, consider the following:

- Co-viewing:** Watching television shows and movies (both educational and for fun) with your child will allow you to scaffold learning in the moment and apply the media to real life situations.
- Playing games:** Join your children in their favorite video games or apps to move screen time from an individual to a social activity. Bring in siblings to make it fun for the whole family.
- Exploring:** View media related to your child's interests or topics they are covering in school to make connections and enrich their learning.
- Communication:** From news stories to commercials, children are exposed to more than just the intended quality programming, app or game. Participating in the screen time with your child can encourage conversation about what they see or hear and will allow you to answer any questions as they arise.

Quality Screen Time

Not all apps, online games or programs are created equal. To ensure quality screen time, consider these tips:

- Preview programs, games and apps before allowing your child to view or play with them.
- Seek out interactive options that engage your child, rather than those that just require pushing and swiping or staring at the screen.
- Use parental controls to block or filter internet content.
- Make sure your child is close by during screen time so that you can supervise his or her activities.
- Ask your child regularly what programs, games and apps he or she has played with during the day.
- Play a video game or explore a new app with your child.
- When watching programming with your child, discuss what you're watching and educate him or her about advertising and commercials.

Seek out information from organizations such as Common Sense Media to help you determine if a program, game or app is appropriate.

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

Teaching Appropriate Behavior

Online relationships and social media have become a major part of adolescent life. Experts suggest that it's OK for your teen to be a part of these worlds — as long as he or she understands appropriate behavior. Explain to your teen what's OK and what's not OK, such as sexting, cyberbullying and sharing personal information online. Teach your child not to send or share anything online that he or she would not want the entire world to see for eternity. No matter how smart or mature you feel your child is, monitor his or her online and social media behavior. Your child is bound to make mistakes using media. Talk to your child and help him or her learn from them. Also, model positive online etiquette yourself.

(www.mayoclinic.org - "Screen Time and Children - How to Guide Your Child")

Modeling Appropriate Technology Use in Your Home:

- Children who see their parents watching a lot of tv will want to watch more tv themselves
- Follow the same phone/device etiquette rules you have established for your family. For example:
 - If your children aren't going to be on their phones during dinner, then you shouldn't be either
 - Turn off screens at bedtime
 - Abide by screen free times and places
- When engaged in quality family time, be present in that time to the greatest extent possible

Quality Family Time

When you add up all the time your kids spend at day care, in school, asleep, at friends' homes, with babysitters, at camp, and otherwise occupied with activities that don't include you, the remaining moments become especially precious. There are only 940 Saturdays between a child's birth and her leaving for college. That may sound like a lot, but how many have you already used up? If your child is 5 years old, 260 Saturdays are gone. Poof! And the older your kids get, the busier their Saturdays are with friends and activities. Ditto Sundays. And what about weekdays? Depending on your children's ages and whether you work outside the home, there may be as few as one or two hours a day during the week for you to spend with them. However, instead of worrying about how many minutes you can spend with your children each day, focus on turning those minutes into memorable moments. Parents often compensate for having such a small quantity of time by scheduling "quality time."
(<http://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/positive/quality-time/>)

Tips to Develop Quality Family Time:

- Stay present and in the moment with your child. Focusing on them is what matters most.
- Give positive attention to your child - praise, repeating their words, smiling and making eye contact, imitating, playing what they want to play, having real fun together.
- Quality time can happen anytime and anywhere.
- Plan one-on-one time on a regular basis with each child.
- Don't rush kids - spend time together that is calm and unhurried

Ideas for Positive Family Activities

- Get outside - fresh air at home or a change of scenery
- Take walks together - walk the dog, take a walk after dinner, walk instead of drive in town
- Special dinner nights
- Fix things together
- Cook, bake, and create together
- Establish special family traditions and fun treats
- Play their games - let them show you their world
- Get physical - sports, exercise, biking, hiking
- Volunteer as a family, contribute to your community

More Resources:

- http://www.ctparenting.com/familyfun_overview.php
- <http://www.parenting.com/family-time/activities>
- <https://www.pinterest.com/explore/family-fun-activities/>
- <http://www.parents.com/fun/activities/>



Media Use in School-Aged Children and Adolescents

COUNCIL ON COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA

This policy statement focuses on children and adolescents 5 through 18 years of age. Research suggests both benefits and risks of media use for the health of children and teenagers. Benefits include exposure to new ideas and knowledge acquisition, increased opportunities for social contact and support, and new opportunities to access health-promotion messages and information. Risks include negative health effects on weight and sleep; exposure to inaccurate, inappropriate, or unsafe content and contacts; and compromised privacy and confidentiality. Parents face challenges in monitoring their children's and their own media use and in serving as positive role models. In this new era, evidence regarding healthy media use does not support a one-size-fits-all approach. Parents and pediatricians can work together to develop a Family Media Use Plan (www.healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan) that considers their children's developmental stages to individualize an appropriate balance for media time and consistent rules about media use, to mentor their children, to set boundaries for accessing content and displaying personal information, and to implement open family communication about media.

INTRODUCTION

Today's generation of children and adolescents are growing up immersed in media, including broadcast and social media. Broadcast media include television and movies. Interactive media include social media and video games in which users can both consume and create content. Interactive media allow information sharing and provide an engaging digital environment that becomes highly personalized.

Media Use Patterns

The most common broadcast medium continues to be TV. A recent study found that TV hours among school-aged children have decreased in the past decade for children younger than 8 years.¹ However, among children aged 8 years and older, average daily TV time remains over 2 hours per

abstract



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day.² TV viewing also has changed over the past decade, with content available via streaming or social media sites, such as YouTube and Netflix.

Overall media use among adolescents has continued to grow over the past decade, aided by the recent increase in mobile phone use among teenagers. Approximately three-quarters of teenagers today own a smartphone,³ which allows access to the Internet, streaming TV/videos, and interactive “apps.” Approximately one-quarter of teenagers describe themselves as “constantly connected” to the Internet.³

Social media sites and mobile apps provide platforms for users to create an online identity, communicate with others, and build social networks. At present, 76% of teenagers use at least 1 social media site.³ Although Facebook remains the most popular social media site,³ teenagers do not typically commit to just 1 social media platform; more than 70% maintain a “social media portfolio” of several selected sites, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.³ Mobile apps provide a breadth of functions, such as photo sharing, games, and video-chatting.

Video games remain very popular among families; 4 of 5 households own a device used to play video games.⁴ Boys are the most avid video game players, with 91% of boys reporting having access to a game console and 84% reporting playing video games online or on a cell phone.³

Benefits of Media

Both traditional and social media can provide exposure to new ideas and information, raising awareness of current events and issues. Interactive media also can provide opportunities for the promotion of community participation and civic engagement. Students can collaborate with others on assignments and projects on

many online media platforms. The use of social media helps families and friends who are separated geographically communicate across the miles.

Social media can enhance access to valuable support networks, which may be particularly helpful for patients with ongoing illnesses, conditions, or disabilities.⁵ In 1 study, young adults described the benefits of seeking health information online and through social media, and recognized these channels as useful supplementary sources of information to health care visits.⁶ Research also supports the use of social media to foster social inclusion among users who may feel excluded⁷ or who are seeking a welcoming community: for example, those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, or intersex. Finally, social media may be used to enhance wellness and promote healthy behaviors, such as smoking cessation and balanced nutrition.⁸

Risks of Media

A first area of health concern is media use and obesity, and most studies have focused on TV. One study found that the odds of being overweight were almost 5 times greater for adolescents who watch more than 5 hours of TV per day compared with those who watch 0 to 2 hours.⁹ This study’s findings contributed to recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatrics that children have 2 hours or less of sedentary screen time daily. More recent studies have provided new evidence that watching TV for more than 1.5 hours daily was a risk factor for obesity, but only for children 4 through 9 years of age.¹⁰ Increased caloric intake via snacking while watching TV has been shown to be a risk factor for obesity, as is exposure to advertising for high-calorie foods and snacks.^{11,12} Having a TV in the bedroom continues to be associated with the risk of obesity.¹³

Evidence suggests that media use can negatively affect sleep.¹⁴ Studies show that those with higher social media use¹⁵ or who sleep with mobile devices in their rooms¹⁶ were at greater risk of sleep disturbances. Exposure to light (particularly blue light) and activity from screens before bed affects melatonin levels and can delay or disrupt sleep.¹⁷ Media use around or after bedtime can disrupt sleep and negatively affect school performance.¹³

Children who overuse online media are at risk of problematic Internet use,¹⁸ and heavy users of video games are at risk of Internet gaming disorder.¹⁹ The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*,²⁰ lists both as conditions in need of further research. Symptoms can include a preoccupation with the activity, decreased interest in offline or “real life” relationships, unsuccessful attempts to decrease use, and withdrawal symptoms. The prevalence of problematic Internet use among children and adolescents is between 4% and 8%,^{21,22} and up to 8.5% of US youth 8 to 18 years of age meet criteria for Internet gaming disorder.²³

At home, many children and teenagers use entertainment media at the same time that they are engaged in other tasks, such as homework.²⁴ A growing body of evidence suggests that the use of media while engaged in academic tasks has negative consequences on learning.^{25,26}

Media Influence

Evidence gathered over decades supports links between media exposure and health behaviors among teenagers.²⁷ The exposure of adolescents through media to alcohol,^{28,29} tobacco use,^{30,31} or sexual behaviors³² is associated with earlier initiation of these behaviors.

Adolescents’ displays on social media frequently include portrayal

of health risk behaviors, such as substance use, sexual behaviors, self-injury, or disordered eating.³³⁻³⁶ Peer viewers of such content may see these behaviors as normative and desirable.^{37,38} Research from both the United States and the United Kingdom indicates that the major alcohol brands maintain a strong presence on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.^{29,39}

Cyberbullying, Sexting, and Online Solicitation

Cyberbullying and traditional bullying overlap,⁴⁰ although online bullying presents unique challenges. These challenges include that perpetrators can be anonymous and bully at any time of day, that information can spread online rapidly,⁴¹ and that perpetrator and target roles can be quite fluid in the online world. Cyberbullying can lead to short- and long-term negative social, academic, and health consequences for both the perpetrator and the target.⁴² Fortunately, newer studies suggest that interventions that target bullying may reduce cyberbullying.⁴³

"Sexting" is commonly defined as the electronic transmission of nude or seminude images as well as sexually explicit text messages. It is estimated that ~12% of youth aged 10 to 19 years have ever sent a sexual photo to someone else.⁴⁴ The Internet also has created opportunities for the exploitation of children by sex offenders through social networking, chat rooms, e-mail, and online games.⁴⁵

Social Media and Mental Health

Research studies have identified both benefits and concerns regarding mental health and social media use. Benefits from the use of social media in moderation include the opportunity for enhanced social support and connection. Research has suggested a U-shaped relationship between Internet use

and depression, with increased risks of depression at both the high and low ends of Internet use.^{46,47} One study found that older adolescents who used social media passively (eg, viewing others' photos) reported declines in life satisfaction, whereas those who interacted with others and posted content did not experience these declines.⁴⁸ Thus, in addition to the number of hours an individual spends on social media, a key factor is how social media is used.

Social Media and Privacy

Content that an adolescent chooses to post is shared with others, and the removal of such content once posted may be difficult or impossible. Adolescents vary in their understanding of privacy practices⁴⁹; even those who know how to set privacy settings often don't believe they will work.⁵⁰ Despite efforts by some social media sites to protect privacy or to delete content after it is viewed, privacy violations and unwelcome distribution are always risks.^{51,52}

Parent Media Use and Child Health

Social media can provide positive social experiences, such as opportunities for parents to connect with children via video-chat services. Unfortunately, some parents can be distracted by media and miss important opportunities for emotional connections that are known to improve child health.^{53,54} One research study found that when a parent turned his or her attention to a mobile device while with a young child, the parent was less likely to talk with the child.⁵⁵ Parental engagement is critical in the development of children's emotional and social development, and these distractions may have short- and long-term negative effects.

CONCLUSIONS

The effects of media use are multifactorial and depend on the

type of media, the type of use, the amount and extent of use, and the characteristics of the individual child. Children today are growing up in an era of highly personalized media use experiences, so parents must develop personalized media use plans for their children that attend to each child's age, health, temperament, and developmental stage. Research evidence shows that children and teenagers need adequate sleep, physical activity, and time away from media. Pediatricians can help families develop a Family Media Use Plan (www.HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan) that prioritizes these and other health goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Pediatricians

- Work with families and schools to promote understanding of the benefits and risks of media.
- Promote adherence to guidelines for adequate physical activity and sleep via a Family Media Use Plan (www.HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan).
- Advocate for and promote information and training in media literacy.
- Be aware of tools to screen for sexting, cyberbullying, problematic Internet use, and Internet gaming disorder.

Families

- Develop, consistently follow, and routinely revisit a Family Media Use plan (see the plan from the American Academy of Pediatrics at www.HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan).
- Address what type of and how much media are used and what media behaviors are appropriate for each child or teenager, and for parents. Place consistent limits on hours per day of media

use as well as types of media used.

- Promote that children and adolescents get the recommended amount of daily physical activity (1 hour) and adequate sleep (8–12 hours, depending on age).
- Recommend that children not sleep with devices in their bedrooms, including TVs, computers, and smartphones. Avoid exposure to devices or screens for 1 hour before bedtime.
- Discourage entertainment media while doing homework.
- Designate media-free times together (eg, family dinner) and media-free locations (eg, bedrooms) in homes. Promote activities that are likely to facilitate development and health, including positive parenting activities, such as reading, teaching, talking, and playing together.
- Communicate guidelines to other caregivers, such as babysitters or grandparents, so that media rules are followed consistently.
- Engage in selecting and co-viewing media with your child, through which your child can use media to learn and be creative, and share these experiences with your family and your community.
- Have ongoing communication with children about online citizenship and safety, including treating others with respect online and offline, avoiding cyberbullying and sexting, being wary of online solicitation, and avoiding communications that can compromise personal privacy and safety.
- Actively develop a network of trusted adults (eg, aunts, uncles, coaches, etc) who can engage with children through social media and to whom children can turn when they encounter challenges.

Researchers, Governmental Organizations, and Industry

- Continue research into the risks and benefits of media.
 - Prioritize longitudinal and robust study designs, including new methodologies for understanding media exposure and use.
 - Prioritize interventions including reducing harmful media use and preventing and addressing harmful media experiences.
- Inform educators and legislators about research findings so they can develop updated guidelines for safe and productive media use.

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American Academy Of Pediatrics Lifts 'No Screens Under 2' Rule

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Heard on Morning Edition

ANYA KAMENETZ



A new policy statement says kids as young as 15 months can learn from media when a caregiver is present and involved.

TongRo Images Inc./Getty Images

If there's one rule that most parents cling to in the confusing, fast-changing world of kids and media, it's this one: No screens before age 2.

As of today, that rule is out the window.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, which first issued that recommendation back in 1999, has extensively updated and revised its guidelines for children and adolescents to reflect new research and new habits.

The new guidelines, especially for very young children, shift the focus from **WHAT** is on the screen to **WHO** else is in the room. And in doing so, they raise some intriguing points about the future of learning from media.

For babies younger than 18 months, AAP still says no screens at all are the best idea — with one notable exception: live video chat. Surveys indicate that families already popularly believe

that "Facetime doesn't count," or at least that the benefit of virtual visits with grandparents or other relatives outweighs the potential cost of exposing babies to the laptop or phone.

The AAP doesn't cite positive evidence that infants actually get something out of this kind of "conversation" the way that they clearly do from live social interaction. But there is some observational research that infants as young as 6 months old are emotionally engaged by playing live peekaboo with Grandma on Skype.

For infants and toddlers, age 15 months to 2 years, there is limited evidence from a couple of very small studies that they can learn new words from educational media, *if and only if* parents are watching alongside them, repeating what the video says and/or drawing attention to what is on the screen. In other words, treating a video or an app like a picture book is the best bet.

The flip side of this is that many studies, including this one, have actually shown poorer language skills correlated with earlier solo viewing of "educational" videos. There is also research that shows language delays in children who watch more TV and start watching earlier. In both cases, the problem seems to be media replacing interaction with people. For this reason, the new AAP guideline has changed from "avoid all screens under age 2" to "avoid solo media use in this age group."

For preschoolers age 2 to 5, there is more evidence that they have the ability to transfer knowledge from screens to the real world, including early literacy and math, and positive social and emotional skills and behaviors.

But the AAP has a strong brand preference here. It names Sesame Workshop and PBS as two trusted makers of evidence-based children's educational media, whereas of an estimated hundred-thousand "education"-branded apps in the iPad store, very few have been found to satisfy high standards for learning.

For this age group, AAP recommends no more than an hour a day of screen use. And, just as with younger children, it wants caregivers to take part in screen time:

"Co-view with your children, help children understand what they are seeing, and help them apply what they learn to the world around them."

How to Limit Your Child's Screen Time

WRITTEN by JOSHUA BECKER · [114 COMMENTS](#)



"Television is the menace that everyone loves to hate but can't seem to live without." — Paddy Chayevsky

According to the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#):

- Kids under age 6 watch an average of about 2 hours of screen media a day, primarily TV and videos or DVDs.
- Kids and teens 8 to 18 years spend nearly 4 hours a day in front of a TV screen and almost 2 additional hours on the computer (outside of schoolwork) and playing video games.
- Counting all media outlets, 8-18 year-olds devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes to using entertainment media across a typical day

And the effects of television on children are not good. Children who watch too much television:

- Carry a much higher risk of childhood obesity.
- Are more likely to display aggressive behavior. Children naturally copy what they see. (For a simple, chilling experiment, allow your son to watch professional

- wrestling and see how long it takes before he tackles his sister).
- Are more likely to engage in "risky behaviors" when they get older.
- Have less energy.
- Have a harder time in school.
- Are more-exposed to commercials, advertisements, and propaganda.

Most people would agree that our culture watches too much. Yet, few people are able to curb their habit and reclaim their life. And even fewer know how to help their children navigate the media-drenched world we live in.

To help inspire parents, here are **12 tips to help limit your child's screen time**.

Each of these are tried-and-true methods used in our home and others.

Set the Example. Sorry to start with the toughest one, but there is nowhere else to start. Children will always gravitate toward the modeled behaviors of their parents. If they see you reading a book, they are more likely to read. And if they see you watching television, so will they.

Be the Parent. It is your job to encourage healthy behaviors and limit unhealthy ones – sometimes this means making unpopular decisions. Make these tough decisions for your children. And always go the next step of explaining why you have made the decision – this will help them follow through and someday choose it for themselves.

Set Limited Viewing Times. If you are not going to turn off the television completely, choose the appropriate television viewing windows for your kids. It is much easier to limit their viewing habit if they understand that they can only watch one show in the morning and one show after school (as just an example).

Encourage Other Activities. And provide the necessary resources (books to read, board games, art supplies, and/or sporting equipment).

Play with Your Kids. Get down on the floor with your kids and pick up a doll, truck, or ball. It takes intentionality and selfless love when they are 6. But when they turn 13, you'll be glad you did.

Be Involved in Their Lives. For many parents, it is just easier to turn on the television than to actually be involved in the lives of their children. But those intimate life details are required for successful parenting. So observe, listen, ask, and parent.

Cut your Cable / Remove Your Television Completely. If you want a sure-fire way to limit your child's television viewing habits, cut your cable/satellite television feed (or

remove your television completely). It will change your family's life overnight (it changed ours). Oh, by the way, it will positively impact your checkbook too.

Observe Your Child's Behavioral Changes. Television has an immediate impact on your child's behavior. After too much television/video games, my children get irritable, aggressive, selfish, and impatient. I can tell almost the moment I walk in the door. Be on the look-out for these behavioral changes. When you start to notice them yourself, you'll be less inclined to put your kids in front of the screen.

Don't Worry if They Miss Out on Parts of the Conversation. Your child's friend will talk about television. They will compare notes about cartoons, Nickelodeon, or prime-time programming. You will think that you are depriving your child of friendships because they can not join in on those parts of the conversation (I'm speaking from experience). But don't worry. You will have successfully prepared to your child to enter into far deeper, richer conversations than the most recent Hannah Montana episode.

Value Family Meals and Car Rides. About two-thirds (64%) of young people say the TV is usually on during meals. That's too bad because your family's richest conversations will always take place during meals and in the car. Value those times with you kids. Don't let the TV steal them from you.

No TV's in Bedrooms. Not your kids' rooms. And not yours either.

Find your mantra. A *mantra* is a sound, word, or group of words that are considered capable of creating transformation. While the words may not be magic in themselves, the consistent use of them can be. Every parent should have them and use them effectively. My "too-much television" mantra goes like this, "There's been too much screen time in this family." And every time my kids hear me say it, they know what it means... they know we are about to spend some quality time together.

Limiting your child's screen time may seem like an impossible chore or it may seem like a battle that is too difficult to fight. But it is worth fighting.

Implementing just a few steps right away will help you implement the others. Television viewing is a momentum-gathering behavior. The more you do it, the more compelled you are to continue (advertisements have that effect on viewers). But the opposite is also true. The more you turn it off, the easier it becomes to keep off. You've just got to start somewhere.

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“I’m bored!” Kids in the Summer Part I: Screen time

How can kids make the best of summer screen time?

Posted Jun 24, 2010

“I’m *boooooooooored* . . . “

Ah . . . the sounds of summer.

Adults often look with envy at the long stretches of leisure that punctuate the lives of children. Kids look forward to summer vacation all winter long. So it’s really frustrating when parents’ fantasies of leisurely bike rides, fishing trips, and reading in the hammock crash into the reality of kids gazing blankly at video screens, machine gunning imaginary terrorists, or whining that there’s nothing to do.

The goal of this short series is to suggest some ways of shaping your kids’ summer to keep it fun, low-key and child driven.

Summer is important. For years, sociologists and educational psychologists have known that the achievement gap that separates low from high income kids from the same school doesn’t occur during the school year. They happen during the summer.

The findings are startling. Many school districts test children in September when they return from vacation and again at the end of the school year. How much their scores change tells us what they’ve learned. In the late 1970’s, a clever educational sociologist took those data and looked at it differently. He decided to look at the change from June to September.

Findings were clear. Kids who differed in social class learned at just about the same rate while school was in session. However, every summer, children from lower socioeconomic status (SES) homes lost about four months of learning. In other words, if their reading level was at 4th grade 10 months in June, they would come back in September reading at the 4 years 6 months level. Upper SES kids came back in September at the same level they had left or maybe a little higher. Because this happens every summer and over time, those lost months add up. By the end of elementary school, the summer loss accounted for most of the performance difference between lower and upper SES kids. More recent research has replicated and extended these findings. The richer language environments and more diverse activities available to high SES kids helped them maintain what they'd learned.

This first entry in my blog on kids in the summer focuses on what kids seem to want most during the summer and parents seem to hate most: Screen time. How can you help your kids have a RELAXING and FUN summer, without letting their minds wither in the heat?

What's a parent to do?

Tip number one: Put on a timer.

Unless you're going to ban computers and video entirely, the most important strategy for managing children's screen time is simply to **make a plan and stick to it**. Pick an amount of time and a time a day that's comfortable for you and keep screen time to those limits.

For example, my son doesn't play computer games in the morning. Why? Simple. Because if he gets up in the morning and has to find something else to do, he often gets so involved with a friend or a book or a project that he doesn't get back to the computer. And if he does, I know he's already done something else, and I fret less. In addition, the afternoon is often a hot, miserable time of day to be outside and running around in norther Ohio, where I live. *There's a reason*

they invented the siesta! If you're going to veg out, the afternoon is a better time to do it. And if we wind up going to the pool in the afternoon instead, so much the better.

Tip number two: Use screen time for fun and profit.

There is nothing wrong with playing video games or watching tv if you've helped your kids choose good content. What's good content?

First, even though I grew up on tv, I **strongly recommend videos and video games over television.** Why? Two reasons: content and process.

- Unless your children only watch public television, tv time is commercial time. Content analysis of the ads placed around children's programming suggest that it is heavily loaded towards high fat, sugary foods or towards movies and toys. In other words, even if the show is great, the ads will give your kids a wicked case of the 'me wants'. Even more problematic in my experience, have been the placement of advertisings for movies or television shows that are completely inappropriate for kids around shows I'm happy for them to watch. For example, I clearly remember my son running from the room in terror when a profoundly creepy horror movie ad came while we were watching Star Trek. Using DVDs allows you to get just the show you want without the commercials.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

- Another advantage of videos is that they END. Television never does. Research has shown that the longer you watch tv, the less likely you are to turn the television off when your program ends. In other words, watch one show and you might have a 75% chance of switching off and doing something else after the finale. Watch a second one, and that chance may go down to 50%. Although I have not seen research to support this notion, I would not be surprised if video games work the same way. In addition, unless you start your timer straight on the hour, when your timer runs out, your child may be in the middle of a show. Not a good way to start.

Second, use video to learn something: Video provides amazing learning opportunities. Kids can learn Pokemon trivia on screen OR they could pick up facts about history, science, and literature. Your library probably has wonderful DVDs available for free that your kids will love. The *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, *Reading Rainbow*, or *Eyewitness* video series will all give your kids hours of entertainment and put a lot of useful trivia in the way of their roaming minds. Most PBS series are available on DVD. Series like *Anne of Green Gables* or *Sarah Plain and Tall* or *Horatio Hornblower* are great entertainment and teach kids about history without a lecture in sight.

It doesn't have to say 'educational' to be 'educational'. I have written before about how kids pick up random knowledge – inefficiently but with incredible persistence – through aimless play. My oldest son knows all the Greek gods and legends from watching *Hercules* on tv. No one would label that educational television. *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Three Musketeers*, or old Disney comedies all provide cultural content. I learned to recognize the scores from *Carmen* and *Das Rheingold* from *Bugs Bunny* cartoons and Aesop's fables from *Rocky and Bullwinkle*.

Use video as a bridge to something more. Having real books about mythology or the *Percy Jackson* series lying around next to the television wouldn't hurt either. Even comic books. Both my kids moved from beginning to fluent readers with long stretches of *Calvin and Hobbes*. You can complement their interest by taking out related books or pulling together a craft or science project that the video may have piqued. If you search on-line, you may find educational websites with teaching materials, fun activities and books already suggested.

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Tip Number 3: Use your Computer as Toy

Kids can use computers for more than playing games. Don't forget the activities that come with your computer – like a good Paint program. One of the my youngest's favorite things to do is take a picture with my digital camera, put it in a paint program, and morph it in all the ways that photo editing can do. Default paint programs come

with both Windows and Apple machines. There are inexpensive programs that may have come with your camera and others available at your local tech store.

My oldest son made truly incredible animations by using a paint program to make a series of drawings. Then he would string them together to make animations, including soundtracks. Windows MovieMaker, iMovie or Picasa are all free and have this capability. Microphones and sound editing programs are also part of many computer systems. It doesn't have to be fancy for the kids to have fun. If you own a webcam or have digital videos, movie software does fun effects too. What can your kid think to do with them?

Even word processors can be used creatively to make cards, newspapers, or write, illustrate and decorate stories.

Chose computer games that YOU like. Computer games aren't all violent and filled with monsters. If you look, you can find many that are creative and cooperative. Search parent sites for ratings, reviews, and recommendations. Games that focus on open-ended exploration or creature creation (e.g., Spore), historical or puzzle games (e.g., Oregon Trail, Myst), or the many, many simulation games (e.g., The Sims, Age of Mythology) can provide older kids with long periods of fun. The state of Ohio, where we live, made a terrific resource of educational games available for free. Your state may too. Whatever games you choose, just make sure you are comfortable with the content – read the labels and online reviews.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

Tip Number 4: Get physical

One of the big complaints developmentalists and health professionals have about kids' screen time is that time spent watching isn't time spent moving. You can change that. How?

- ***Take away their chair!*** Because I spend so much time at my desk, I recently raised it up so I have to stand to use my computer. After a day or two of

adjustment, I found I had lots more energy and the circulation in my legs improved markedly. A door on adjustable height horses makes a great computer table.

- ***Sit on a ball!*** To help my very wiggly on use his energy while playing games, I replaced his chair with a large Pilates ball. Staying balanced on it keeps him active even while wandering through the Legos universe.
- ***Play games that make you move.*** Recent reports have suggested that playing Wii games helps senior citizens maintain their balance and stay active. It works for kids too. Games like *Dance Dance Revolution* or *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* force kids to move more than just their mouse hand.

Tip Number 5: Make screen time their choice, not a battle

The saying goes that all things are good in moderation – even moderation. Videos and computers can provide kids with great resources. Let kids choose from some of the best options screen time can provide and give them control over when they do it within limits you are comfortable with. Giving them control over what they do in their free time helps them to understand that the limits you have set are based on prudential concerns, rather than your desire to thwart them and bore them into the pool.

For more on kids in the summer, click [Here](#) for the second part of the series that focuses on boredom or [here](#) for a post on why just letting kids ramble around may not be such a bad idea after all.

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SEP 14 **How to Cope With After-School Meltdowns**
By Katie Hurley, LCSW
Raising Kids (<http://www.pbs.org/parents/expert-tips-advice/category/raising-kids/>), Social & Emotional Learning (<http://www.pbs.org/parents/expert-tips-advice/category/emotional-health/>)



360



A mom of an

eight-year-old boy called me as a last resort. In the days before making the call, she met with the classroom teacher, the school director and the school psychologist. She spent time in the classroom, observed from her car during recess and kept a close eye on him during his soccer games on the weekend. No matter how much investigating she did, she couldn't figure out why her son seemed so unhappy every afternoon.

This mom went on to describe a scenario that I hear from parents of school age children over and over again: He's bright and happy in the morning, but completely miserable when he gets home. He lashes out at his parents, he can't get along with his siblings and he falls apart for no real reason. At first, she thought exhaustion was to blame. After a couple of weeks, she began looking for clues at school. What she found out too her by surprise: He was perfectly fine in school all day. In fact, his teacher couldn't think of a single issue that might cause the meltdowns.

Going to school can be completely exhausting for many kids. The school day can be physically, emotionally and mentally draining. Young children expend a lot of energy sitting still and focusing in class. They have rules to follow, work to complete and responsibilities to fulfill. Many of them lack sufficient time to play, run and regroup throughout the day. By the time they get home from school, they are quick to fall apart.

The bad news is that kids tend to save their most difficult behavior for their parents. The silver lining is that they trust us to help them through those trying moments and to love them anyway. The good news in all of this is that we make simple changes to help kids cope with the overwhelming emotions that often settle in once the day is done. Here's how:

Leave the questions for later. It's no big secret that busy is the new normal, and sometimes this leads to immediate questions about what kids learned during the school day, how much homework needs to get done and what happened during recess. We engage in insta-catch-up during the ride from here to there because we want to connect with our kids, but most kids need time to decompress and zone out before discussing the daily play-by-play.

A simple greeting and a hug or high-five is a great way to connect and provide emotional space from the school day. "I'm so happy to see you!" is my favorite after school greeting with my own kids. They both meet me with big smiles when I start with a positive statement.

Prioritize downtime. Kids need time to play, hang out, read or create on their own terms. Unstructured time is the first thing to go when families get busy, and that can have big repercussions for kids.

After school routines should include plenty of time for kids to unwind and engage in free play.

Be present. We worry about the impact of screen time on the developing brain, but we forget that our own screen time use can negatively impact our relationship with our kids. If your child senses a disconnect, he will retreat. It's important for us to disconnect from our phone and other screens when our kids come home from school.

The best way to reconnect with our kids is to be present when they are in our presence. Make eye contact. Listen with intent. Let your child speak without attempting to fix any identified problems. Often, children need someone to listen while they work through their feelings and problem-solve out loud.

Play together. I often recommend playing a board game or a simple card game with children right after school. Spending time playing quietly together or reading together helps ease kids out of the overwhelming feelings that the end of the day brings and into a calmer state of mind.

Snack it up. Get ahead of the hunger crash by planning the after school snacks in advance. Many children come home starving and dehydrated, even if they communicate otherwise. This is not the time to try new foods, however. Put out snacks they enjoy with tall glasses of water and sit with them while they refuel.

Create a homework routine. Prevent homework wars by setting up a clutter-free spot to work and trying to do the homework at the same time each day. Set a timer and allow for plenty of breaks. If your child is struggling, write a note to the teacher and close the books for the day.

Kids are under increased pressure today. They are learning academics earlier and earlier. They also don't have enough time to release energy. It's no surprise our kids return home in a compromised state. It's important for us to let our kids get back to the business of being a kid to help decrease stress and improve their emotional well-being.

Staying positive: things to try

TODDLERS

1-3 years

Behaviour

Connecting & communicating

Connecting

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By Raising Children Network

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Loving attention, warmth and care are critical for your child's development, learning and self-esteem. No parent can provide this every minute of every day, but over time you can build a strong and positive relationship.

Your family is unique. There's no formula or a best or right way to create a strong relationship with your child – each family has to figure it out for themselves. There will be times when you don't or can't do what you'd like for your child, but if you put time into building positive relationships in your family, those relationships will see you through.

You can build positive relationships by:

- being in the moment with your child
- spending quality time with your child
- working on family management.

Being in the moment

When you give loving positive attention to your child, you help her build a picture of herself as a person who is valued and valuable. This kind of attention doesn't have to be a big deal – you just need to 'be in the moment' with your child.

This means trying to **tune in and think about what is going on with your child**. Sometimes this is simply showing acceptance, letting your child be and not giving directions all the time. It's good to give your child the opportunity to take the lead, to have input, to make suggestions and ask questions.

When you're really in the moment, you respond to your child in ways that aren't impulsive or based on habit. Being in the moment includes praising, repeating your child's words, smiling and making eye contact, imitating, playing what your child wants to play, and really having fun together. Parents who give these responses can see dramatic changes in their children.

Your child can tell when you're not really paying attention – when you're giving those mindless 'mmm' responses to what he's saying. Of course this will happen sometimes, but the aim is to tip the balance in favour of being positive and present.

Spending 'quality time'

Quality time can happen anytime and anywhere, in the middle of ordinary days and situations. A shared laugh when you're bathing your toddler, the discovery of the season's first flower in the garden with your six-year-old, or a good conversation in the car with your eight-year-old – these can all be quality time. Just listen closely to your child or stop what you're doing to pay full attention to her.

You can also make quality time by taking advantage of any opportunity, however small, to **show that you value and appreciate your child**. For example, you can communicate powerful positive messages with your smiles, laughter, eye contact, hugs and gentle touches.

Quality moments like these are an essential factor in building a positive relationship with your child.

The time you spend with your child also makes a difference to how he learns. For example, the time you spend talking with your child in the first three years of life helps him learn language.

Working on family management

Strong family relationships are helped by looking at how your family members interact on a day-to-day basis. Here are some ideas:

- **Plan some one-on-one time on a regular basis** with each of your children. Some children are quieter and don't demand as much attention as others, and they might get left out. On a busy work day, one-on-one time with a child might be brief,



but over a week, try to have some longer interactions.

- **Set aside one-on-one time with your partner.** Investing in a strong, loving relationship with your partner is also investing in your relationship with your child. It can take effort, but it's well worth it. If you're a single parent, you could try setting aside time with an extended family member or a close friend. Maintaining your relationships with adults will help you feel supported.
- Think about ways to **organise the household routine** so it's less stressful. Even simple changes can help, such as using an ongoing shopping list so you won't have to rush off unexpectedly to the supermarket to get milk as soon as you get home.
- When children are old enough, **give them some household responsibilities.** Being responsible for some chores, no matter how small, help children feel they're making a valuable contribution to the family's wellbeing. Even very young children like the feeling of belonging that comes from making a contribution.

Our [Family Management](#) section has more tips and ideas.

Video Special moments with your child

'They're all different ... but they all want to feel safe. They all want to feel loved. They all want you to feel proud of them', says the one of the mums in this short video.

Other mums and dads talk about special moments with their children – how they happen and how you can make them happen. They describe how praise and encouragement build positive family relationships and make their children feel safe and secure.

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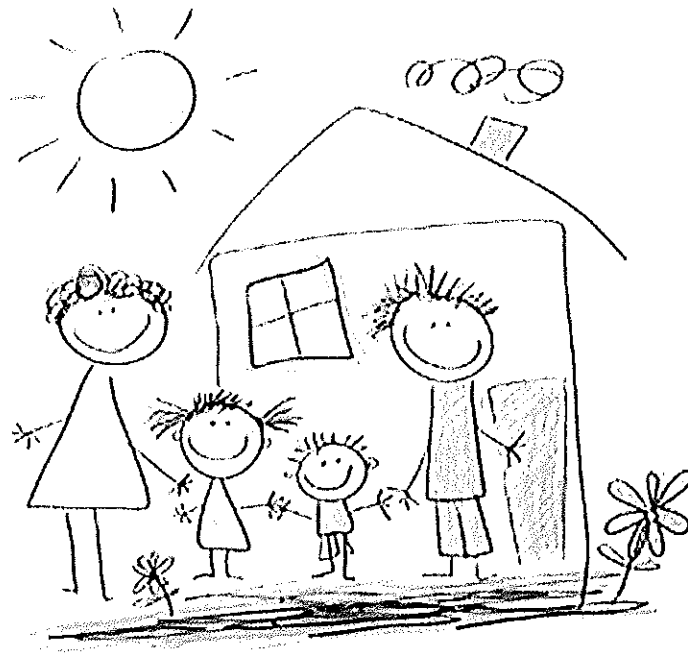


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9 Things You Should Say to Your Kids Everyday

-Power of Positivity (powerofpositivity.com)

1. "I love you" - Say it to them as many times as you'd like
2. "I like it when you..." - Talk about the positive aspects of your behavior
3. "You make me feel happy" - Makes them feel valuable
4. "I'm proud of you" - They need to feel they're doing a good job, even when its hard
5. "You are special" - Let them know their uniqueness is a strength
6. "I trust you" - Building a foundation of trust raises an honest person
7. "I believe in you" - Teach them how valuable they are
8. "I know you can do this!" - Encourage them to never give up
9. "I'm grateful for you" - Be specific, this can really make their day



The Atlantic

All Work and No Play: Why Your Kids Are More Anxious, Depressed

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OCT 12, 2011 | HEALTH

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For more than fifty years, children's free play time has been continually declining, and it's keeping them from turning into confident adults



What are your memories of playing as a child? Some of us will remember hide and seek, house, tag, and red rover red rover. Others may recall arguing about rules in kickball or stick ball or taking turns at jump rope, or creating imaginary worlds with our dolls, building forts, putting on plays, or dressing-up. From long summer days to a few precious after-school hours, kid-organized play may have filled much of your free time. But what about your children? Are their opportunities for play the same as yours were? Most likely not.

Play time is in short supply for children these days and the lifelong consequences for developing children can be more serious than many people realize.

THE DECLINE OF PLAY

An article in the most recent issue of the *American Journal of Play* details not only how much children's play time has declined, but how this lack of play affects emotional development, leading to the rise of anxiety, depression, and problems of attention and self control.



MORE FROM THE DOCTOR:

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Heavy Drinking Affects Diet

The Animal-Free Diet

"Since about 1955 ... children's free play has been continually declining, at least partly because adults have exerted ever-increasing control over children's activities," says the author Peter Gray, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology (emeritus) at Boston College. Gray defines "free play" as play a child undertakes him- or her-self and which is self-directed and an end in itself, rather than part of some organized activity.

Gray describes this kind of unstructured, freely-chosen play as a testing ground for life. It provides critical life experiences without which young children cannot develop into confident and competent adults. Gray's article is meant to serve as a wake-up call regarding the effects of lost play, and he believes that lack of childhood free play time is a huge loss that must be addressed for the sake of our children and society.

WHO AND WHAT IS INTERFERING WITH CHILDREN'S PLAY?

Parents who hover over and intrude on their children's play are a big part of the problem, according to Gray. "It is hard to find groups of children outdoors at all, and, if you do find them, they are likely to be wearing uniforms and following the directions of coaches while their parents dutifully watch and cheer." He cites a study which assessed the way 6- to 8-year-olds spent their time in 1981 and again in 1997.

The researchers found that compared to 1981, children in 1997 spent less time in play and had less free time. They spent 18 percent more time at school, 145 percent more time doing school work, and 168 percent more time shopping with parents. The researchers found that, including computer play, children in 1997 spent only about eleven hours per week at play.

In another study, mothers were asked to compare their own memories of their playtime, to their children's current schedules. Eighty-five percent noted that their children played outdoors less frequently and for shorter periods of time than they had. The mothers noted that they restricted their own children's outdoor play because of safety concerns, a fact echoed in other surveys where parents mentioned child predators, road traffic, and bullies as reasons for restricting their children's outdoor play.

Adding to the problem, Gray notes, is our increasing emphasis on schooling and on adult-directed activities. Preschools and kindergartens have become more academically-oriented and many schools have even eliminated recess. It is not that anyone set out to do away with free play time. But its value has not been recognized. As a result, kids' free play time has not been protected.

FIVE WAYS PLAY BENEFITS KIDS

When children are in charge of their own play, it provides a foundation for their future mental health as older children and adults. Gray mentions five main benefits:

1. Play gives children a chance to find and develop a connection to their own self-identified and self-guided interests.

As they choose the activities that make up free play, kids learn to direct themselves and pursue and elaborate on their interests in a way that can sustain them throughout life. Gray notes that: "...in school, children work for grades and praise and in adult-directed sports, they work for praise and trophies.... In free play,

children do what they want to do, and the learning and psychological growth that results are byproducts, not conscious goals of the activity."

2. It is through play that children first learn how to make decisions, solve problems, exert self control, and follow rules.

As children direct their own free play and solve the problems that come up, they must exert control over themselves and must, at times, accept restrictions on their own behavior and follow the rules if they want to be accepted and successful in the game.

As children negotiate both their physical and social environments through play, they can gain a sense of mastery over their world, Gray contends. It is this aspect of play that offers enormous psychological benefits, helping to protect children from anxiety and depression.

"Children who do not have the opportunity to control their own actions, to make and follow through on their own decisions, to solve their own problems, and to learn how to follow rules in the course of play grow up feeling that they are not in control of their own lives and fate. They grow up feeling that they are dependent on luck and on the goodwill and whims of others...."

Anxiety and depression often occur when an individual feels a lack of control over his or her own life. "Those who believe that they master their own fate are much less likely to become anxious or depressed than those who believe that they are victims of circumstances beyond their control." Gray believes that the loss of playtime lessons about one's ability to exert control over some life circumstances set the scene for anxiety and depression.

3. Children learn to handle their emotions, including anger and fear, during play.

In free play, children put themselves into both physically and socially challenging situations and learn to control the emotions that arise from these stressors. They role play, swing, slide, and climb trees ... and "such activities are fun to the degree

that they are moderately frightening ... nobody but the child himself or herself knows the right dose."

Gray suggests that the reduced ability to regulate emotions may be a key factor in the development of some anxiety disorders. "Individuals suffering from anxiety disorders describe losing emotional control as one of their greatest fears. They are afraid of their own fear, and therefore small degrees of fear generated by mildly threatening situations lead to high degrees of fear generated by the person's fear of losing control." Adults who did not have the opportunity to experience and cope with moderately challenging emotional situations during play are more at risk for feeling anxious and overwhelmed by emotion-provoking situations in adult life.

4. Play helps children make friends and learn to get along with each other as equals.

Social play is a natural means of making friends and learning to treat one another fairly. Since play is voluntary and playmates may abandon the game at any time if they feel uncomfortable, children learn to be aware of their playmates' needs and attempt to meet them in order to maintain the play.

Gray believes that "learning to get along and cooperate with others as equals may be the most crucial evolutionary function of human social play ... and that social play is nature's means of teaching young humans that they are not special. Even those who are more skilled at the game's actions ... must consider the needs and wishes of the others as equal to their own, or else the others will exclude them." Gray cites increasing social isolation as a potential precursor to psychopathology and notes that the decline in play may be "both a consequence and a cause of the increased social isolation and loneliness in the culture."

5. Most importantly, play is a source of happiness.

When children are asked about the activities that bring them happiness, they say they are happier when playing with friends than in any other situation. Perhaps you

felt this way when remembering your own childhood play experiences at the beginning of this article.

Gray sees the loss of play time as a double whammy: we have not only taken away the joys of free play, we have replaced them with emotionally stressful activities. "[A]s a society, we have come to the conclusion that to protect children from danger and to educate them, we must deprive them of the very activity that makes them happiest and place them for ever more hours in settings where they are more or less continually directed and evaluated by adults, setting almost designed to produce anxiety and depression."

THE LOSS OF PLAY AND RISE OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

There has been a significant increase in anxiety and depression from 1950 to present day in teens and young adults and Gray cites several studies documenting this rise. One showed that five to eight times as many children and college students reported clinically significant depression or anxiety than 50 years ago and another documented a similar trend in the fourteen- to sixteen-year-old age group between 1948 and 1989.

Suicide rates quadrupled from 1950 to 2005 for children less than fifteen years and for teens and young adults ages 15-25, they doubled. Gray believes that the loss of unstructured, free play for play's sake is at the core of this alarming observation and that as a society, we should reassess the role of free play and the factors that seem to have all but eliminated it from our children's lives.

When parents realize the major role that free play can take in the development of emotionally healthy children and adults, they may wish to reassess the priorities ruling their children's lives. The competing needs for childcare, academic and athletic success, and children's safety are compelling. But perhaps parents can begin to identify small changes -- such as openings in the schedule, backing off from quite so many supervised activities, and possibly slightly less hovering on the playground that would start the pendulum returning to the direction of free, imaginative, kid-directed play.