



Healthy Lifestyle

Children's health

By Mayo Clinic Staff

With screens virtually everywhere, monitoring a child's screen time can be challenging. To complicate matters, some screen time can be educational and support children's social development. So how do you manage your child's screen time? Here's a primer on guiding your child's use of screens and media.

Too much screen time and regular exposure to poor-quality programming has been linked to:

- Obesity
- Inadequate sleep schedules and insufficient sleep
- Behavior problems
- Delays in language and social skills development
- Violence
- Attention problems
- Less time learning

Keep in mind that unstructured playtime is more valuable for a young child's developing brain than is electronic media. Children younger than age 2 are more likely to learn when they interact and play with parents, siblings, and other children and adults.

By age 2, children may benefit from some types of screen time, such as programming with music, movement and stories. By watching together, you can help your child understand what he or she is seeing and apply it in real life. However, passive screen time shouldn't replace reading, playing or problem-solving.

The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages media use, except for video chatting, by children younger than 18 months. If you introduce digital media to children ages 18 to 24 months, make sure it's high quality and avoid solo media use. For children ages 2 to 5, limit screen time to one hour a day of high-quality programming.

As your child grows, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work as well. You'll need to decide how much media to let your child use each day and what's appropriate.

Consider applying the same rules to your child's real and virtual environments. In both, play with your child, teach kindness, be involved, and know your child's friends and what your child does with them. Also, keep in mind that the quality of the media your child is exposed to is more important than the type of technology or amount of time spent.

To ensure quality screen time:

- Preview programs, games and apps before allowing your child to view or play with them. Organizations such as Common Sense Media has programming ratings and reviews to help you determine what's appropriate for your child's age. Better yet, watch, play or use them with your child.
- 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.
- When watching programming with your child, discuss what you're watching and educate your child about advertising and commercials.

Also, avoid fast-paced programming, which young children have a hard time understanding, violent content and apps with a lot of distracting content. Eliminate advertising on apps, since young children have trouble telling the difference between ads and factual information.

Establish clear rules and set reasonable limits for your child's use of digital media. Consider these tips:

- Encourage unplugged, unstructured playtime.
- Create tech-free zones or times, such as during mealtime or one night a week.
- Discourage use of media entertainment during homework.
- Set and enforce daily or weekly screen time limits and curfews, such as no exposure to devices or screens one hour before bedtime.
- Consider using apps that control the length of time a child can use a device.
- Keep screens out of your child's bedroom and consider requiring your children to charge their devices outside of their bedrooms at night.
- Eliminate background TV.

At some point your child will be exposed to content that you haven't approved and devices without internet filters. Talk to your child about the situations that could occur and the behavior you expect.

Encourage your child to think critically about what they see on their screens. Ask your child to consider whether everything on the internet is accurate. Does your child know how to tell if a website is trustworthy? Help your child understand that media are made by humans with points of view. Explain that many types of technology collect data to send users ads or to make money.

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 your child understands appropriate behavior. Explain what's allowed and what's not, 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, set a good example. Consider that your child is watching you for cues on when it's OK to use screens and how to use them.

You'll likely need to continue to guide, manage and monitor your child's use of screens and media as he or she grows. But by developing household rules — and revisiting them as your child grows — you can help ensure a safe experience.

Show References

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