

Wellbeing Essentials Screen Time



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Screen Time

Reducing the amount of time we spend on screens (TV, computers, phone) helps us to be more relaxed. This is particularly important in the evening before we go to bed.

What Are The Recommended Usage Times?

For an adult, the recommended average discretionary screen time per day is 2 hours (this is time we choose to look at screens, not when we need to use them for work). This includes all screens – telephone, computer and TV.

What about kids?

I found this incredibly helpful US article on www.thriveglobal.com. Some excellent information for parents...

It seems we see shocking headlines about screen time, and the negative effects electronic devices have on kids, on a weekly basis these days. As a parent, it can be frustrating and difficult to sift through the latest research and figure out a plan that works for your family. You may be shocked to hear that screen time isn't all bad, in fact, it has a lot of surprising benefits, but the key is to manage your child's screen time wisely.

Screen time usage today

To have a better idea of what we're working with here, it helps to see the hard numbers pertaining to our kids' daily screen time use and consumption. Keep in mind that these facts include the time, which is growing each year, that our children spend using computers and tablets at school.

A 2015 Pew Research Center study reports that 92 percent of 13 to 17-year olds go online daily, which isn't too shocking, when we consider our own computer, tablet and smartphone usage.

Here's where things get scary: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that children ages 8 to 10 spend an average of 6 hours per day in front of a screen, kids ages 11 to 14 spend an average of 9 hours per day in front of a screen, and youth ages 15 to 18 spend an average of 7.5 hours per day in front of a screen. Wow.

Effects of screen time on kids

The effects of screen time on our kids is an especially difficult area to keep up with, as studies are continually releasing new findings. However, what we're seeing from these studies is enough to make any parent take pause.

Let's start with the fact that, among high-income countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the USA has the highest obesity rates for boys and girls -- a growing trend so alarming that child obesity has been labeled as an epidemic. And while the child obesity epidemic can't be blamed solely on electronic devices, screen time has typically been synonymous with "sit time".

Early introduction to electronic devices, such as smartphones and tablets, is now being linked to speech delays in toddlers, reduced sleep and delayed sleep onset. Older children, including teenagers, are also feeling the negative effects of screen time, with poor sleep quality and higher incidences of depression (related to social media use in teens).

Screen time guidelines

It's important to note that most of the negative effects of screen time on children are related to excessive use of electronic devices on a daily basis. For this reason, it's helpful to know expert's recommendations for screen time use, which were updated by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) last year. The AAP makes the following recommendations for screen time:

- *For children under 18 months old, screen time should be limited to video chatting*
- *Children 18-24 months should only be exposed to high-quality media, with parents watching alongside to help them understand and engage with what they're watching*
- *Children 2-5 years old should be limited to 1 hour per day of high-quality programming; again, parents should watch along with them to help them make real world connections*

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- Children 6 years and older should have established and consistent limits on the time spent using media, with parents ensuring that digital media doesn't take the place of sleep, physical activity or real-life personal interactions

Managing screen time at home

The first, and most important, thing you need to do is to model behavior by limiting your own screen time to a maximum of 2 hours per day -- practice what you preach, parents!

Keep a record of how much time your children are spending in front of a screen, and how much time they're spending outdoors or engaged in some type of physical activity; make sure that both are equally balanced, or require your children to "earn" screen time equal to their amount of physical activity each day.

Treat screen time as a privilege in your home, and figure out a system to reward your kids with screen time. Most importantly, remove electronic media from your children's bedrooms at night, to enforce screen time limits and encourage a calming bedtime routine

What happens when screen time – particularly gaming – becomes excessive?

The International Classification of Diseases (ICD) is a document produced periodically by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The last edition was produced in 1992.

The ICD is a guide that doctors use to track and diagnose diseases.

In the newest edition (2018) of the ICD, gaming addiction is listed as a mental health condition for the first time. It is known as Gaming Disorder (see page 3).

In some ways, this is a good thing. It means that this type of addiction will be taken seriously and that more support will be available.

Some countries already restrict the hours that young people can access online games (South Korea, Japan, China), some identify it as a major public health issue and some countries (including the UK) have private "addiction" clinics to treat the condition.

But is it all bad?

Part of Normal Life

At Oxford University a recent study has suggested that young people are not necessarily gaming to the exclusion of everything else, rather that they mix their screen time with daily life, doing things like homework – much like adults using computers at work.

Supporting Poor Mental Health

Also, Johnny Chiodini (a video game producer) argues that some good is done by gaming.

He has a YouTube series called 'Low Batteries' that looks at how some people actually use gaming to help them cope with existing mental health struggles.

He says that he personally used video games as a support tool whenever his life was difficult and that this helped to stop his internal negative self-talk.

Active Involvement – Greater Understanding

One benefit that gaming offers above TV and books is that players can get actively involved. So, instead of just watching a character deal with a problem, the player actively solves the problem for them, leading to a more in-depth understanding.

For example, there is a game called 'Life is Strange' which allows players to 'walk a mile' in the shoes of someone who has mental health problems.

In this game, players control a girl who can rewind time. The story is about how one single action can cause a chain reaction that affects many people. It is about the importance of decision making.

Suicide is one of the issues that it deals with and at the end of difficult scenes it brings up advice and helpline numbers.

There was also a TV programme that dealt with suicide called '13 Reasons Why'.

A lot of people would argue that being involved in solving the issue (active) rather than just watching someone else go through it (passive) leads to much greater empathy.

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So, is gaming good or bad?

My view is that gaming can be both good and bad depending on how it is used.

It is definitely a part of modern life that is here to stay, and I believe that like many other things in life that are potentially addictive (food, alcohol, coffee, work) we need to learn to use gaming in moderation.

But also, like any other mental health issue, if you are worried that you (or a friend) may be developing a problem, please go and talk to someone straight away.

The sooner you get help, the sooner steps can be taken to manage a potential issue or to develop and maintain a healthier approach.

Rachel Munns Founder & Principal

Gaming Disorder

A pattern of persistent or recurrent gaming behaviour so severe that it takes precedence over other life interests.

Symptoms include:

- Impaired control over gaming (frequency, intensity, duration)
- Increased priority given to gaming
- Continuation or escalation of gaming despite negative consequences

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