

Navigating Screen Use in a Tech-filled World: Advice for parents

With the holidays behind us and winter weather in full swing, you may have noticed an uptick in the electronic device use within your home. Here are some suggestions for how to manage the dreaded *screen time dilemma*.

For younger children:

Limit digital media for your youngest family members. Avoid digital media for toddlers younger than 18 to 24 months other than video chatting. Limit screen use for preschool children, ages 2 to 5, to just 1 hour a day of high-quality programming, and engage your children as they watch. Remember that children learn best from watching and talking with you and when they are re-taught in the real world what they just learned through a screen.

Know the value of face-to-face communication. Very young children learn best through two-way communication. Engaging in back-and-forth "talk time" is critical for language development. Conversations can be face-to-face or, if necessary, by video chat with a traveling parent or far-away grandparent.

For kids ages 5-12:

Set limits and encourage playtime. Media use, like all other activities, should have reasonable limits. Unstructured and offline play stimulates creativity. Make unplugged playtime a daily priority, especially for very young children.

Screen time shouldn't always be alone time. Co-view, co-play and co-engage with your children when they are using screens - it encourages social interactions, bonding, and learning. Don't just monitor children online, interact with them - you can understand what they are doing and be a part of it.

Don't use technology as an emotional pacifier. Media can be very effective in keeping kids calm and quiet, but it should not be the only way they learn to calm down. Children need to be taught how to identify and handle strong emotions, come up with activities to manage boredom, or calm down through breathing, talking about ways to solve the problem, and finding other strategies for channeling emotions.

Apps for kids – do your homework. More than 80,000 apps are labeled as educational, but little research has demonstrated their actual quality. Products pitched as "interactive" should require more than "pushing and swiping." Look to organizations like Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org) for reviews about age-appropriate apps, games and programs.

For teens:

It's OK for your teen to be online. Online relationships are part of typical adolescent development. Social media can support teens as they explore and discover more about themselves and their place in the grown-up world. Just be sure your teen is behaving

appropriately in both the real and online worlds. Keep lines of communication open and let them know you're there if they have questions or concerns. For more tips on how to talk with your teen about screen use, check out: <https://www.screenagersmovie.com/>.

Warn children about the importance of privacy and the dangers of predators and sexting. Teens need to know that once content is shared with others, they will not be able to delete or remove it completely and includes texting of inappropriate pictures. They may also not know about or choose not to use privacy settings, and they need to be warned that sex offenders often use social networking, chat rooms, e-mail, and online gaming to contact and exploit children. One of the most common first encounters of an exploiter with a potential victim occur online. For more information on protecting children from sexual exploitation, including **local resources** to connect with, please visit: <http://www.listenforthesigns.org/>.

Apps for teens – do your homework some more! Technology is constantly changing, and it is important to stay current on what your teen is using. For more insight and a guide to the “most dangerous apps of 2018”, go to: <https://educateempowerkids.org/dangerous-apps-2018-2/>

For the whole family:

Make your own family media use plan. Media should work for you and within your family values and parenting style. When used thoughtfully and appropriately, media can enhance daily life. But when used inappropriately or without thought, media can displace many important activities such as face-to-face interaction, family-time, outdoor-play, exercise, unplugged downtime and sleep. *Be a good role model by limiting your own media use too!* Make your plan together with your family at www.HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan.

Remember: Kids will be kids. Kids will make mistakes using media. Try to handle errors with empathy and turn a mistake into a teachable moment. But some indiscretions, such as sexting, bullying, or posting self-harm images, may be a red flag that hints at trouble ahead. Parents must observe carefully their children's behaviors and, if needed, enlist supportive professional help, including the family pediatrician.

Content adapted from the American Academy of Pediatrics' "Children and Media Tips" (2018). For more information on the AAP's screen time recommendations visit: <https://aap.org>

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If you have further questions or comments about this message or would like information on how to become involved with the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth, please email bnugent@tompkins-co.org.

