



Screen Time

The use of televisions, computers, and video games is becoming more and more common among young children in today's society. This current trend can be referred to as "screen time." When used appropriately, they may stimulate vocabulary, creativity and positive/appropriate social behavior. However, watching television and playing computer or video games are fairly inactive activities which have been found to contribute to an increase in obesity. The content of many games/programs is also a concern, many are not appropriate for children. Parents and caregivers share the ability to influence and educate a child. While the child is in the providers' care, the caregivers have a responsibility to monitor how much screen time and the content a child receives as well as offering and supporting other age appropriate activities.

Age-Appropriate Limits for Screen Time

Infant Children (0-2 years)

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) does not recommend television for children this young
- Encourage direct interaction with caregiver

Toddler Children (2-3 years)

- Limit children of this age to no more than a ½ hour of screen time a day
- Appropriate shows and games for children of this age group that are both educational and fun

Preschool Children (3-5 years)

- Limit children of this age to no more than 1 hour of screen time a day
- Children at this age should be able to make choices, but caregivers should intervene to assure that it is appropriate for the age-group

Kindergarten Children (5-6 years)

- Limit children of this age to 1 to 1 ½ hours of screen time a day
- At this age they usually already have their favorite shows or games, but supervision is still necessary for appropriateness of materials

School-Age Children (6-12 years)

- Limit children of this age to 2 to 2 ½ hours of screen time a day, but if children are only in your care after school, limit to no more than 1 hour
- Caregivers need to be very selective about what the children are watching and playing

Developmental Risks of Too Much Screen Time

Musculoskeletal Injuries

- Hand, arm, and wrist tension from repetitive motion on computers
- Stress on developing muscles, bones, tendons, and nerves
- Poor posture while sitting in chairs or on couches

Vision Problems

- Eye strain from screen glare or incorrect lighting
- Eye weakness from sitting too close to computer or TV
- Less flexibility in ability to focus on objects at variable distances
- Children developing near-sightedness much earlier

Obesity and Attention Disorders

- Being overweight, and/or obesity by the age of 6
- Lack of exercise reduces development of social, sensory, intellectual, auditory, and perceptual-motor skills
- Increased findings of attention disorders

Risks to Creativity and Language Development

- More children are needing to be taught how to pretend
- Electronic media takes away from face to face communication, necessary to develop literary skills
- Lack of interaction with others

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Facts:

- The average American child spends between 20 and 30 hours a week engaged in some form of screen time.
- Children who regularly spend more than 10 hours per week watching TV are more likely to be overweight, aggressive, and slower to learn in school. Other problems can include obesity, lack of imaginative play, low reading skills, and reduced social skills.
- Children and adolescents are particularly susceptible to the messages communicated through television, which influence their perceptions and behaviors.
- Children are not able to fully distinguish between what they see and what is real.
- Too much TV may harm children's ability to form pictures in their own imagination, as happens when you tell them a story and they alone have to "draw" the pictures in their mind.
- On average, children and adolescents watch nearly three hours of TV daily—that does not include time spent watching movies, playing video games, or using the computer.
- American youth spend more time with media than with any single activity other than sleeping.
- Children who are heavy television viewers are often more aggressive and have difficulties with day-to-day behaviors.
- Media violence teaches children that fighting is an acceptable way to solve problems; violence is fun, exciting, and a normal part of life; and that the world is a dangerous place and fighting is necessary.

Tips:

- **Supervise children's use of televisions, computers, and video games**-set a screen time budget that allows appropriate amounts of time for each age group.
- **Develop an action plan for your home or child care center**-brainstorm with the kids to create a list of activities to get them on their feet or away from the TV, such as reading, athletics, and creative play.
- **Get them moving in front of the television**-suggest they jog in place or allow the children to participate in dancing or other activities being acted out during the program.
- **Eliminate television viewing for children younger than 2 years old**-encourage interactive activities that will promote appropriate brain development, such as talking, singing, playing, and reading together.
- **Do not use television as the childcare provider**-set up a daily routine of appropriate activities that does not include the use of a television.
- **Do not use screen times as bribes, rewards, or as punishment**-this keeps the television, computer, and video games from becoming overly important issues in the child's life.
- **Have the television or computer on only when someone is watching or using it**-this avoids making it a part of the child's everyday life and a form of background noise.
- **Watch television with the children**-talk about the programs you view together. Explain, comment, and give your opinions about what you and the children see. This is also a time for you to take a break from the day to relax.
- **Limit the amount of television watched at your home or center**-let the children choose one or two shows a day they are allowed to watch, and when those shows are on, that is the only time they are allowed to watch television.
- **Ask parents about their preferences**-maybe parents already have a set limit of screen time they want their child to be engaging in, so it helps to ask to avoid conflict.
- **Choose appropriate materials**-select material with positive context and that which is encouraging of positive social interaction. Avoid material with violent programming including many cartoons and software that allows violence and destruction.
- **Allow children to choose other activities**-while the television is on give children the opportunity to explore play materials and equipment.

Sources:

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