Screen Time – Helping parents and young people manage screen time.

Setting screen-time limits -- and helping children moderate their own habits -- are all about finding the right balance for your family's needs and lifestyle.

Children are spending more time with screen media, and at younger ages, than ever before. In an effort to help families curb their children's use, groups such as the American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have released numerical screen limit guidelines, but the reality is that there really is no magic number that's "just right." What's more important is the quality of children's media, how it fits into your family's lifestyle, and how you engage your children with it.

The idea of screen time as a one-dimensional activity is changing, even the AAP, whose screen time rules had been strictly age-based, is recognising that not all screen time is created equal. Computers, tablets, and smartphones are multipurpose devices that can be used for lots of purposes. Even so, the World Health Organization is sticking with specific screen time amounts on the theory that sedentary activities such as playing computer games is contributing to the global obesity epidemic. However, designating device use simply as "screen time" can miss some important variations.

The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens identifies four main categories of screen time.

- Passive consumption: watching TV, reading, and listening to music
- Interactive consumption: playing games and browsing the Internet
- Communication: video-chatting and using social media
- Content creation: using devices to make digital art or music

Clearly, there's a lot of difference among these activities. But as valuable as many of them can be, it's still important for children's overall healthy development to balance their lives with enriching experiences found off screens.

These tips can help:

- Pay attention to how your children act during and after watching TV, playing video games, or hanging out online. If they're using high-quality, age-appropriate media; their behaviour is positive; and their screen-time activities are balanced with plenty of healthy screen-free ones, there's no need to worry.
- If you're concerned about heavy media use, consider creating a schedule that works for your family. This can include weekly screen-time limits, limits on the kinds of screens children can use, and guidelines on the types of activities they can do or programs they can watch. Make sure to get your child's input so the plan teaches media literacy and self-regulation, and use this as an opportunity to discover what they like watching, introduce new shows and apps for them to try, or schedule a family movie night.
- The AAP 's guidelines, released in October 2016, allow for some screen time for children younger than 2 and emphasize parental involvement for all children. In a nutshell:
- Avoid use of screen media other than video-chatting for children younger than 18 months.
- If you choose to introduce media to children 18-24 months, find high-quality programming and co-view and co-play.
- Limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality programs for children age 2 to 5 years.
- Create a family media plan with consistent rules and enforce them for older children and teens.

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The reality is that most families will go through periods of heavy and light media use, but, so long as there's a balance, children should be just fine.

Information on this page has been adapted from:

How much screen time is OK for my kid(s)?

By Common Sense Media