KIDS ACADEMY
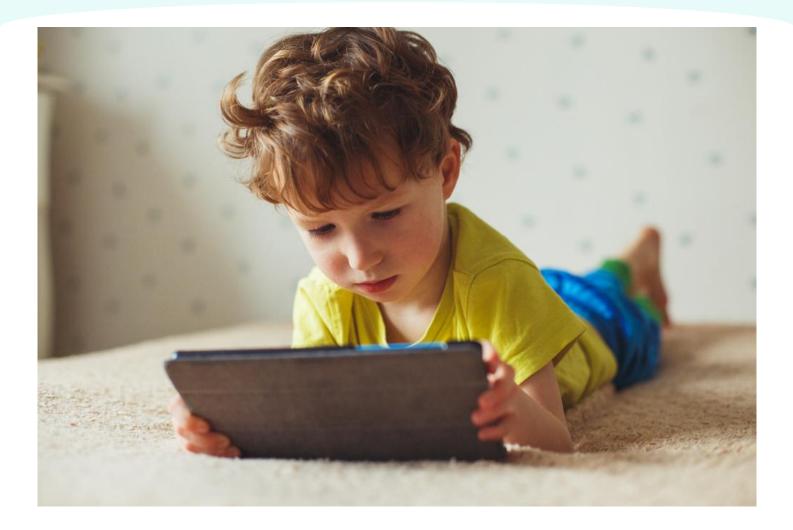
Reducing Screen Time when School is Online: Tips for Making Screen Time Count

www.kidsacademy.mobi

As parents and teachers, most of us probably remember the news reports covering the shocking 2016 study from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) that laid bare both the benefits and risks of screen time in children. In it, the AAP noted that kids who are on screens for multiple hours each day face the risks of becoming overweight, may experience trouble sleeping, and are in danger of dealing with cyberbullying and adverse behavioral issues as they grow older and are more exposed to social media.

Considering the stark risks that come with spending a lot of time online, it should be no surprise that screen time is one of the chief concerns both parents and teachers have this year considering the unexpected and abrupt shift to virtual school due to the Covid-19 pandemic. With classes mostly taking place online for a huge chunk of the nation's children, the amount of time students spend in front of screens have skyrocketed.

Still, as the pandemic keeps its hold over the country, online learning is the reality for the immediate future, at least to some degree, as students are returning back to the classroom in a hybrid format, if at all. All this considered, what can educators as well as parents do to mitigate the risks involved with heavy amounts of screen time?

First, let's take a deeper look at why it's important to manage screen time, or at least make sure that kids are getting the most out of it. Then, keep reading to discover some of the best tips for both teachers and parents to reduce the amount of time spent online or engaged with electronics.

Why We Should Reduce Screen Time

As mentioned earlier, the main concern for kids and screen time tends to revolve around the inactivity that comes along with spending many hours stationary looking at a screen. According to the AAP, children are at a higher risk of obesity and related medical conditions, such as diabetes, if they spend more than an hour and a half watching TV or otherwise watching a screen. In addition, as kids grow, the same study mentioned above discusses that:

- Exposure to blue light shortly before or during bedtime can potentially cause sleep disturbances

- Children could go on to develop a disorder that is much like an addiction to gaming or technologyStudents become distracted while completing homework

- Kids may face negative academic consequences

- Screen time should be limited to two hours for young kids

While much of the risk affects older students as they approach adolescence, unhealthy habits are formed from an early age. Unfortunately, with the rise of virtual learning, parents are unable to follow the guideline that suggests that screen time be limited. That said, what can adults do to reduce screen time even during this unprecedented time? Let's examine the strategies teachers can use, while reviewing more realistic guidelines that parents can follow.

All screen time is not equal! Kids Academy strives to develop the best learning apps for an interactive and meaningful experience. Make the most of their screen time and subscribe to the Talented and Gifted app today to get started!

How to Manage Screen Time During Online Learning: Teacher's Edition

- Plan for hands-on activities that kids can easily complete at home and showcase online

Many districts have turned towards mandating a certain number of minutes or hours per day that classes must be administered synchronously via a teleconferencing app. Even so, just because students are logged in doesn't mean the entire time should be spent listening to a teacher lecture or present information. Instead, reduce screen time by planning hands-on activities that kids can complete at home while being monitored on the call.

For instance, a science lesson may include a simple lab that can easily be done at home with materials that are readily available in most homes. Teachers can even provide a menu of options so that every student has the opportunity to choose the activity that suits them best. Allow class time for the completion of those activities and allow children to present their products to their classmates during the synchronous class.

- Use screens creatively; assign students work that can be done by hand but submitted virtually

Homework reduces screen time only when that work is done by hand on paper. Today, it is a necessity to require students of all ages to submit work online, but that doesn't mean students can't complete worksheets or write by hand. Instead, instruct students how to take pictures of their work to submit to the learning management system. If children are busy writing a story, or completing an art picture, let students submit pictures of their work to a media gallery after they are finished. This reduces screen time as children are spending class time away from the screen and working with pencils and paper, just as they would in an ordinary class.

- Take frequent breaks during extended synchronous sessions, especially for younger learners

Even while in the classroom, children need frequent brain breaks to keep them focused and recharged. This is even more important in the online classroom and it helps to reduce the amount of time that students are looking at a screen. For a long synchronous session, and in between subject lessons, plan in extra brain breaks that help kid kids up, stretching, and moving around. Surprise them with a quick scavenger hunt around the house to find supplies or a special item to share with the class.

- Divide online class time into chunks

While it might seem awkward for teachers to tolerate chunks of online time that are virtually silent while students work to complete an assignment, it is necessary to help break up the time, just like in a regular face-to-face class. Ordinarily, educators begin a lesson with some form of warm-up, introduction activity, or mini lesson that gets students going, followed by collaboration, independent work time, and demonstration of mastery.

In an online class, the same class structure should be used as much as possible; don't be afraid to allow students chunks of time to work in small groups via breakout rooms, or independently. This also helps to reduce the screen time as kids are given in-class time to complete assignments away from the laptop.

- Inquire with your school about curbside pickup options for school materials, manipulatives

Another way to lessen the sheer amount of time spent on a screen is to provide children with the very same supplies they would ordinarily access while in the classroom. Most elementary teachers have centers set up in their classroom that contains manipulatives such as base blocks, play money, counters, puzzles, and more! If possible, inquire about setting up a time for parents to pick up packets of manipulatives that can be borrowed and returned at the end of the school year. While this might not be possible in all schools or classrooms, if it can be done, students can further reduce their screen time by practicing the skills being taught using hands-on strategies.

Managing Screen Time: A Parent's Guide

As a parent, it might feel as if your hands are tied when it comes to reducing screen time, especially when classes are all online. Try the following tips to help balance it all out:

• Plan daily trips outdoors

There's no better way to balance the time spent on technology than with a refreshing walk outdoors! Even if the weather is a little cold, don't let it stop your kids from getting some fresh air each day. Plan time spent outdoors into your everyday routine. This could be a small space of time after the school day, or even during lunch. The key is to make it consistent and to leave the electronics at home!

• Take a no-stress approach

Nothing is normal in 2020. Sometimes the best strategy is to see the AAP recommendations for what they are: guidelines that were issued long before any pandemic existed. This year is far out of the ordinary, and perhaps our expectations for what we can reasonably do and control should follow suit. Try not to stress too much

about screen time, as we are grappling with an unprecedented situation that is temporary.

- Rethink afterschool screen time. Selectively plan apps your child uses after school is over and take full advantage of parental controls

After the school day, what do your children do to relax? If your kids are like most, they are likely playing learning games or watching TV. Rethink your child's afterschool routine. What could they do instead? Help students relax and rewind by finding activities that don't involve technology. Take control of their devices by utilizing parental controls to limit screen time when it's not needed.

- Eliminate passive screen time as much as possible

Some online content is more valuable than others, and this is especially true when it comes to the apps kids use. Passive screen time involves very little interaction and is the worst utilization of technology for kids of all ages. Passive means that children are not interacting with or learning anything from the content; learning videos on YouTube Kids is a good example of passive content. Eliminate passive screen time in favor of more valuable activities such as reading worksheets or learning games.

In 2020, teachers and parents are faced with an impossible task: managing their kids' learning when all the classes are online. Follow the advice above to help cut down on screen time, and don't forget to cut yourself some slack during these strange times!