



Key Practices to Manage Screen Time for Family and Academic Engagement

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For families today, parenthood is much different, and sometimes trickier, than ever before. When one considers the amount of changes the world has undergone since today's Millennial generation were children, it truly is baffling to see how much the world has changed. Technological advances in just the last thirty years has brought us the dawn of the internet age, and with it, widespread use of computers, portable devices, and even social media that has revolutionized the way kids and adults communicate.



Since the advent of our beloved smartphones and tablets, parents everywhere have been struggling to figure out just how much and what type of screen time is helpful or even appropriate for their children. And rightly so, considering the amount of conflicting recommendations and press releases on the subject

At this point you might be curious about the current recommendations, and how to best utilize technology to maximize family and academic engagement. After all, there are worthwhile ways to use the internet and apps to your child's advantage! Let's dive deeper into what the studies show about screen time management before we list some key practices parents can use to manage kids' screen time.

What the Experts Say About Screen Time

Just this past spring, you may have seen a bombshell [report](#) by the World Health Organization (WHO) that hit the news airwaves in April. In this press release, the WHO issued new guidelines regarding childhood screen time, which suggest extremely limited usage for children under 5 years old. For example, the WHO sets guidelines that state that children under 2 should not have any screen time at all, while kids from 2 through 4 should have no more than one hour of the organization calls "sedentary screen time".

It's important to note that the WHO's guidelines refer to what it calls "sedentary" screen usage. By reading the entire report, it is evident that the purpose of the press release is to fight childhood obesity, and the aim of the guidelines is to encourage parents to help kids become more physically active. The report, while certainly valid for its own purposes, makes no mention of using screens during learning time, or if or how device usage impacts kids psychologically or socially.

In another study put out by [The University of Oxford](#), researchers found that "moderate screen time" could benefit kids, specifically teenagers. Subsequent research focused on children from ages 2-5, and the study revealed that limiting device usage for younger children is not always beneficial for a child's wellbeing, and in fact showed that how a parent managed device usage was more important of a factor than the screens themselves. Of course, this study focused less on physical activity and health, and focused more on psychosocial health.

In the end, what it seems to come down to is how parents use technology to engage with their children, and the quality of the programming children are exposed to during use. Parental involvement is key to using technology as an effective means of academic learning and family engagement while allowing caregivers to strike a balance between sedentary screen time and physical activity.

So what does this mean for your family? Simply put, as the decision-maker for your kids, it's important to evaluate what the research says, but also your own family's personal beliefs. Come to a consensus within your own family to make a plan of action that works for both you and your children.

[Screen time can be the best time for kids to learn and practice the skills they need to be successful in school and life! Check out high-quality learning games, teacher-led videos, and more available in our Talented and Gifted Program. Sign up for free today!](#)

Tips to Manage Screen Time

Teaching and parenthood have changed so much in just the past couple of decades. With the advent of our favorite technological tools comes the responsibility to ensure our children and students are using them appropriately and in a way that benefits their well-being and education overall. Consider the following key practices to make the best use of screen time for all.



Be a Mentor

Kids don't stay young forever, and eventually you will wonder how to manage teenage screen time. As kids grow older, they begin to branch out socially, becoming independent from parents. This means that as kids age and are exposed to social media, they will become increasingly dependent on their smart phones for not only schoolwork, but for social connection as well. What most teens struggle with as they learn to communicate online is with self-regulation. Ask any parent or secondary teacher, and most will lament about the amount of time spent just trying to get teenagers to put down their phone.

That's why it's best to directly teach children to self-monitor their own screen time starting from an early age. To do this, it's best if parents and/or teachers act as a supportive, positive mentor who, instead of merely reminding kids what to do or not to do, will talk with children about the importance of regulating screen time to prevent overdependence on their technological devices.

Model Appropriate Screen Usage

Alongside mentoring students to help them understand why self-regulation and monitoring is important, both teachers and caregivers should model appropriate screen usage to show that adults practice what they preach. After all, children are unlikely to take life lessons and values to heart if the grownups in their lives don't actually do what they are telling kids to do.

For parents, this might look like:

- Putting away phones and turning off the TV during family mealtimes.
- Refraining from using computers, phones, or tablets before bedtime. This might mean setting a time when the screens are turned off. Instead, read a book, or catch up with the day's news using a newspaper.
- Putting down phones or closing the laptop lid when your child or spouse speaks.
- Avoiding the urge to check messages or emails on mobile devices while driving.

For teachers, this might mean:

- Refraining from texting or answering calls in front of students in the classroom.
- Turning off phones or setting them to silent and placed out of sight during the school day.
- Avoiding idle class time where a teacher might sit behind the desk at the computer.
- Playing movies and videos only for educational purposes.

When used together, mentoring and modelling can become a powerful tool to teach children how to self-regulate their own technology usage to form positive screen-time habits that can last a lifetime.

Set Rules and Boundaries

Whether in your classroom or in your home, setting rules and boundaries for children is a key aspect of setting behavioral expectations and managing issues before they become problems. Of course, the rules you set are dependent on your individual family's situation, or if you're a teacher, the rules must be in place as they are appropriate for the

classroom. While your rules will vary, think about the following suggestions to get started:

- Consider setting screen-time limits that dictate how much time per day children may use devices. For instance, set a rule that allows your child 30 minutes to an hour of time per day that they may use their tablet or watch TV after school.
- Decide exactly how kids will use their time in front of a screen. For instance, plan which apps or devices they will use for academics.
- Don't be afraid to disallow certain apps if you're uncomfortable with kids using them. For example, many parents do not allow their children to watch YouTube, even if it is the kid's version.
- Set clear boundaries that let your child know when using devices is acceptable, and during which times it is not. This might mean setting a clear rule that screens may not be used at the dinner table, etc.
- For teachers, create a system that tells all students when they can use smart phones or tablets, and when they should put it away. For example, many teachers use a stoplight symbol they project on the white board or screen. When it's red, devices must be put away and out of sight.
- Communicate your expectations with children, and then follow through consistently. If kids overstep a boundary or break a rule, deal with that behavior accordingly.

Take Full Advantage of Parental Controls

No matter which device you're using, there's an app for that! Some internet service providers also offer subscribers the ability to set parental controls to control internet usage straight from the source. Be sure to research different monitoring apps depending on your family's unique situation. Some apps are able to track a child's movements or whereabouts, while others can help you monitor internet browsers and app usage.

Be Choosy

Lastly, the main takeaway from the Oxford study mentioned above is that parental involvement and quality programming can enhance a child's wellbeing and education when it comes to using technology with your children. By researching your child's apps and choosing only the highest quality programs, your child can get the most out of their screen time!

As kids grow older, parenthood becomes less about play dates and changing diapers, and more about just figuring out how to manage kids' screen time in our ever-evolving

technological world! Luckily striking the right balance between technology and everything else doesn't need to be difficult or stressful. Follow the tips above to set the right precedent for your growing kids!

