



SCREEN TIME

ADVICE FOR PARENTS

At school, we know that digital screen time is part of everyone's lives. However, when faced with a class of 30 pupils we, as teachers, can clearly see how too much screen time is affecting our boys and girls. We are not advocating a strict ban on screen time, just more awareness about the consequences of too much reliance on devices. These consequences are often displayed in the following ways;

- **Lack of sleep** due to being exposed to too much blue light close to bed time;
- **Lack of focus and concentration in school** as children become used with fast moving images;
- **A loss of fine motor skills** as children are no longer spending time painting, baking, drawing, cutting etc;
- **Images that are too old for your child**, particularly through games. This is when you need to be very careful if your child is near older children, such as cousins or grown-ups playing games that are targeted at over 18s. Do you know what your child is being exposed to? Would you be happy if they were watching the same thing on TV?
- **Physical ability**; children who do not have enough practise throwing and catching a ball, hopping, riding a bike and developing balance;
- **Creativity and imagination**; it is a good thing if your child is bored from time to time. They need to learn how to entertain themselves without relying on a digital device. This is when creativity and imagination grows;
- **Quiet time**; we all need time to be quiet in our own company. This 'resting time' is so important for positive mental health. You can even call it 'resting time' and tell your child that it is for their brain to rest.
- **Talking and listening**; children need interaction and conversation with other children and adults. This is where vocabulary and understanding develops;
- **Be present**; if you are on your phone all the time your child will be fighting for your attention in any way they know how. Put your mobile phone down and engage with your child, especially around meal times, homework time and just before bed. These are such precious moments for you and your child.

How much is too much?

Unfortunately – there is no magic number, children use their devices and computers for lots of different reasons – to learn, to play, and to socialise. The most important thing is to set clear boundaries on screen time and set a good example.

What boundaries should I set?

1. Agree a clear set of rules with your child on screen time in the home. Talk to your child on when you think it is appropriate and inappropriate to use screens. Agree times when screens are allowed and not allowed in the home.

2. Do as you say. Modelling behaviour is **THE** most powerful way you can influence your child's behaviour.

3. Restrict the use of computers/devices in the bedroom. Depending on the age of your child you may want to set a curfew or ban devices from the bedroom completely.

4. Buy an alarm clock for your child's bedroom instead of a phone. This can be a helpful way of giving them a break from the internet.

5. Pick one evening a week where you **do a family activity together**, whether it's movie night, games night. Doing activities together as a family will help implement screen time guidelines and offer fun alternatives.

6. Join in, why not set some time aside to play your child's favourite computer game and discover the online world together. This is a good way of making sure you understand what your child is being exposed to.

7. Try not to rely on screens too much to keep your child amused. It can be easy to encourage children to pick up the tablet or play a game on the computer to keep them occupied. This only confuses rules on screen time, try and stick to the agreed rules with your child and remember to set a good example.

8. Don't have screens always on in the background. Turn off TVs and Computers when not in use, these can be distracting for children if they are trying to participate in another activity.

9. Chat to your child about what they do online and encourage them to use their screen time for learning and education.

IF YOU GIVE YOUR CHILD A DIGITAL DETOX, THEN YOU NEED TO DETOX AS WELL!

Tips for keeping your child's eyes healthy

1. Get them outdoors – regular play and exercise can help prevent or reduce the development of myopia (short-sightedness). Studies show two hours of outdoor activity a day is ideal
2. Use night settings - using night settings, if your device has them, may help children sleep by reducing the amount of blue light given off by the screen during night-time hours
3. Make sure digital devices are turned off at least an hour before bedtime
4. Book your child in for a sight test every two years, from the age of three, or more often if your optometrist recommends it