CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

Tip Sheets
Screen Time

What is Screen Time?

Any time spent looking at an electronic screen is considered screen time. This includes iPads, phones, televisions, and other electronic devices.

- Excessive screen time in childhood has been linked to a range of health problems, including increased risk of obesity and reduced cognitive development.
- Children aged two to three who spend more than 3 hours a day viewing screens grow up to be less physically active compared to children who used screens for an hour or less each day.
- Exposure to digital media should be limited to no more than 1 hour per day for children ages two to five years. Solo media should be avoided with children 18 to 24 months (except for video chatting).

How Screen Time Impacts Young Children

Social Emotional Development
If a child is watching a screen, she is not interacting with peers or participating in meaningful activities appropriate to her age and development. Studies have shown that preschoolers with high screen time have more behavior challenges and show less ability to regulate their emotions.

Cognitive Development
Excessive television viewing is associated with cognitive delays. In one large study, children who reported more than 2 hours a day of screen time got lower scores on thinking and language tests. Even TV playing in the background interferes with a child's ability to interact with her parents or others.

Language Acquisition
Children learn expressive and receptive speech by talking and listening to others. Books encourage language development, though eBooks do not have the same benefit as reading or being read to by a caregiver. Language appears to be delayed in children who have excessive screen time.

Physical Health
Some research has linked obesity in older children to screen time as preschoolers. Children are not moving when they are watching a screen. One study found a toddler's body mass index increased with every hour of screen time spent per week.

Sleep
Children with more screen time exposure or who have televisions in their room sleep less and fall asleep later. Recommendations are for screens to be turned off one hour before bedtime.

Strategies to Support Parents

- Advise parents to take part in any screen time and be involved with the learning. Encourage them to ask questions to make the experience as interactive as possible. Advise them to preview the media before the child uses it.
- Support parents in waiting to give devices to their children in spite of pressure from others. Assure parents that children won't "lose" anything by holding off on using electronics.
- Encourage setting clear time limits for devices, and put rules in place for screen use. If a video is being played online, disable auto-play.
- Help parents come up with alternatives to screen time to engage and involve their children in healthy ways that keep them active.
- Turn off screens when not in use.

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- Give parents alternatives to screens for calming their child. Teach guidance strategies for regulatory skills.

Additional Resources

Mayo Clinic | Screen time and children: How to guide your child
https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/screen-time/art-20047952

Pediatrics | Children and Adolescents and Digital Media
https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162593

Pediatrics | Media and Young Minds
https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162591

Medical Xpress | Toddlers' screen time linked to activity levels as five-year-olds
https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-01-toddlers-screentime-linked-five-year-olds.html