Too much Screen Time comes with some negative consequences!
It’s no doubt that our youth has benefited significantly from advances in technology. Increased screen time, however, comes with some negative impacts and has emerged as a key health issue for our youth. Research has shown that eyesight issues, a lack of socialization, and higher risks of ADHD and obesity are all possible side effects of too much screen time. Acceleration of the use of social media for adolescents and teens has demonstrated its own host of risks, and gives internet predators a gateway to unknowingly influence our children. While screen time (including video games) gives our kids a means for entertainment and parents a reprieve, it has the real effect of displacing other physical activities, which have traditionally been the platform for healthy physical, social and emotional growth for kids.
What does the American Pediatric Society (APS) say?
APS’s guideline for media use in school aged children has recently changed. Past guidelines suggested a strict 2 hour limit to screen time in school aged children. But new guidelines offer a more flexible approach, allowing screen time in moderation and focusing on making kids’ overall digital experience positive for the family. They recommend families first build together and “consistently revisit” a Family media plan. This plan is specific to each and takes into account her or his particular needs to establish healthy technology usage behaviors.
Are there simple age specific guidelines from the American Pediatric Society?
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<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infant Children (0-2 years)</td>
<td>Recommends no television time for children this young</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preschool Children (2-5 years)</td>
<td>No more than an hour of screen time a day of high quality programming with parents watching alongside child</td>
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<td>School-Age Children (6+)</td>
<td>Should have established and consistent limits on the time spent using media, with parents ensuring that digital media doesn’t take the place of sleep, physical activity or real-life personal interactions.</td>
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So what are the most important and agreed upon guidelines for limiting screen time at home?
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Guidelines +

Risks

First, focus specifically on what the real risks are and talk to your kids openly about how these risks can be mitigated. If screen time is causing insufficient sleep or inactivity, for example, focus on addressing that risk specifically and explain the impacts in language they can understand. “Your phone can’t be in your room overnight because it will disrupt your sleep and you need sleep to grow and to be healthy.” Doing so will cause them to be more likely to make a specific change and abide by rules they see as protective rather than controlling. And if their maturity level isn’t high enough to understand these risks, consider waiting to give them their own device.
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Model appropriate technology behaviors (limits should be self-imposed!) and embrace/stay current with technology to be able to talk to your kids about it. It won't work to place limits on our kids but excessively indulge ourselves; whatever rules are in place, parents need to follow them too. And pediatricians and social workers agree, placing limits doesn't mean zero screen time, it just means prioritizing time with devices for the most productive activities (like education). Parents must be tech savvy themselves to assess when their kids' digital behaviors are excessive or inappropriate. Schools urge parents to understand and use communication and social media outlets that their kids are using and to patrol interactions. Download Instagram and snapchat and know how to tweet so you can talk to kids about their digital interactions and how they're being perceived online. Ensure they truly understand the lasting and broad impact that a picture or a written post can have on their reputation. And if there is a mistake made, turn it into a teachable moment rather than a punishment.
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Establish Tech Free Zones like the dinner table, the car and bedrooms. Do not allow (under ANY circumstances) devices into bedrooms past bedtime or overnight. Purchase a central charging station for all devices in the household; establish and enforce rules for storing devices here so that kids and parents always know where they are. Recognizing the distraction that devices can have on teenagers, some schools have implemented policies to keep cell phones out of classrooms.
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Know your child’s passwords for each device and post these in a central place for child care providers to access. They need to know that an adult owns (and pays for) the device and that responsibility for what happens on it is shared between the child and the parent. Many school districts, including ours, require parents and kids sign an acceptable use of technology policy each school year. Parents should educate their kids that the responsible use of technology includes their interaction with social media, specifically, but also extends to a responsible amount of time spent on the devices as well.
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Set aside regular time to unplug and create family activities that do not involve screen time. Digital detox has been proven to help kids' behavior, particularly before bedtime. Create opportunities for your family to come together at a meal without technology, play together, indulge in non-screen activities, or decompress before going to bed (read/listen to a book instead of watching TV). Make physical activity a love for your family (eg. playing pickup basketball in the driveway, going for a bike ride, or taking a walk). Take advantage of the public parks in town and the many (free!) activities they offer – and checkout the winter enrichment and summer enrichment programs offered by the schools. Finally, during the school year take advantage of the Family Connect nights offered by the schools to have a mid-week family check in that is device free. There are so many ways to keep our kids busy – Garden City offers so many resources!
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Establish reasonable limits on screen time and teach screen time as a privilege, not a right. Ensure the limits and rules are clear cut, understood and enforced consistently. For example, a limit of 2 hour/day for teenagers and 1 hour/day for school aged kids is simple to understand. Integrate these limits into your kids’ daily routines rather than as a mandate from parents (feeling punitive). Get feedback from your kids on what they believe is a reasonable set of limits and ensure they feel heard and have some control. Takeaway privileges if rules are not followed but don’t allow extra screen time as a reward. For example, where Xbox or Netflix is allowed on weekends only (and not during the week), violating the rules takes weekend time away (as opposed to good behavior adding time during the week).
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1. Get technical - use Parental Control features to Limit Use and Access. Be sure to check out parental controls for any device or app your child is using, including Apple’s Screen Time App and Google’s Family Link. Get app usage data, schedule downtime, set time limits by app and set content privacy restrictions. If that’s not sufficient, look into the top 10 parental control apps on the market. These apps monitor social networks, send automatic parental alerts, monitors texts, and sets screen time limits (be sure to check out their ratings and reviews – each one works a little differently). Or if you’re feeling more technical, you can go to the source and configure your router to block or limit Wifi access to certain devices. When establishing user accounts on your Windows PC, you can setup family safety features to establish controls like app and website access and usage limits. Finally, every browser has the ability to establish privacy settings; Chrome’s privacy settings allows for safe browsing protection and Internet Explorer’s tools allow for blocking of specific websites. If your challenges come from a specific app like Netflix (and what movies and shows are being viewed), parental controls can be configured including kids only Netflix access. Any of these tools provides an additional safeguard that kids’ access to content and screen time is appropriately controlled by parents.
Is there a guideline or recommendation for the XBOX?
Microsoft has addressed the XBOX overuse concern and has posted *directions on how to limit* the time children spend on their XBOX. Some parents suggest that rather than placing time limits on video game usage, place a limit on a number of games; this number would be set based upon the average duration of a game. For example, Fortnite generally takes longer to play than a Dance game so a limit for Fortnite would be 2 (20-30 min) games in one sitting as opposed to a Dance (5 min) game. Players tend to lose track of time while playing video games but stay aware of the number of games played. Imposing a limit on the number of games vs. the duration sets the child up to gain a sense of completion after finishing a game and to independently walk away when done.
What does the GC School District say about the topic?

Learn More
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Dr. Sinha, our superintendent of schools, felt strongly enough about the topic that she posted a [special Q&A in the March PTA newsletter](#). She says “it is important to set rules and structure around the appropriate use of technology.” She specifically recommends setting time limits based upon recommended guidelines and the importance of keeping an open and honest dialogue with your children.
Where do I get more information?

Learn More
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• Checkout these useful resources
  • Q&A with Superintendent’s Dr. Sinha on this topic.
  • “Screen time is taking a toll on children”
  • Growing Up Social: Raising Relational Kids in a Screen-Driven World
  • Screenagers – a documentary film about screen addiction
  • Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction Is Hijacking Our Kids-and How to Break the Trance
  • Reset Your Child’s Brain: A Four-Week Plan to End Meltdowns, Raise Grades, and Boost Social Skills by Reversing the Effects of Electronic Screen-Time
  • Tips for Reducing Screen Time
  • Healthy Kids, Health Habits