

SCREEN PRECAUTIONS



Television



Computer/Internet



Video Games



Cell Phone

Today's screens (television, computer, video consoles, handheld video, & cell phones) have a tremendous influence on how children view our world. Television (TV) viewing can be the opportunity to see different life-styles and cultures. Computers and the Internet can be useful sources of educational material. Video games and TV can have great entertainment value. While children can be positively influenced by "screen time," most spend too much time in front of the screens and usage is on the rise. From 2004 to 2009, the amount of time the average 8 to 18-year-old spent with media (TV, video, Internet) rose almost 20% to 7 ¾ hours a day. Most youngsters spend more hours watching TV from birth to age 18 than they spend in the classroom. As a result of excessive and/or unlimited exposure, children may experience many of the negative consequences described below.

HARMFUL ASPECTS OF SCREEN TIME

- **Screen time replaces active types of recreation and discourages exercise.**

It decreases time spent playing with peers. A child has less time for self-directed daydreaming and creative thinking. It takes away time for participating in sports, music, art, or other activities that require practice to achieve competence.

- **Screen time interferes with conversation and discussion time.**

It reduces social interactions with family and friends.

- **Screen time discourages reading.**

Reading requires much more thinking than watching television. Reading improves a youngster's vocabulary. A decrease in reading scores may be related to too much time in front of the TV.

- **There are NO PROVEN benefits to TV watching under 2 years of age, and it may cause harm.**

Early exposure to television watching (1-3 year olds) is associated with language delay in toddlers and with subsequent attention problems in school-age children (7 year olds).

- **A television in the bedroom can be hazardous to your child's health**

Research has shown that a TV in a child's bedroom is associated with obesity, sleeping difficulties, and school dysfunction. These children tend to watch more TV and spend less time in active play.

- **Heavy TV viewing (more than 4 hours a day) definitely reduces school performance.**

This much TV interferes with study, reading, and thinking time. If children do not get enough sleep because they are watching TV, they will not be alert enough to learn well on the following day.

- **TV advertising encourages a demand for material possessions.**

Young children will pressure their parents to buy the toys they see advertised. TV portrays materialism as the "American way."

- **TV and video game violence can affect how a child feels toward life and other people.**

Viewing excessive violence may cause a child to be overly fearful about personal safety and the future. TV and video violence may numb the sympathy a child normally feels toward victims of human suffering. Young children may be more aggressive in their play after watching real or virtual violence.

VIDEO GAMING

- **Be a good example.**

As a parent, limit your media use (TV, Video gaming, Computer). Your children are watching you.

- **Postpone video game play until at least 8 year of age.**

Avoid buying a video game console for your child prior to 8 years of age, and then limit its use. The younger a child begins playing video games, the more attractive it will become.

- **Encourage active alternatives to game playing,**

Encourage shooting baskets outside rather than playing it on the video screen.

- **Only allow video game play after all critical tasks are done,**

School, homework, physical activity, adequate sleep, and sit-down meals with the family should take priority over any game playing.

- **Don't rely upon industry-sponsored ESRB game-rating system.**

Talk with other parents and consult other rating sites on the Internet.

- **Play every one of your child's video games**

Carefully review the content and view the games before allowing your child to play them.

PREVENTING SCREEN ADDICTION

- **Encourage active recreation.**

Help your child become interested in sports, games, hobbies, and music. Turn off the television *often* and go outside to take a walk or play a game with your child. Model an active lifestyle by not watching too much TV yourself; don't be a "couch potato."

- **Read to your children.**

Begin reading to your child by 1 year of age and encourage him to read on his own as he becomes older. Some parents help children earn TV or video game time by equivalent reading time. Help him improve his conversational skills by spending more of your time talking with him.

- **Do not allow a TV set in your child's bedroom.**

A TV in the bedroom eliminates your control over TV viewing (content and amount) and is associated with sleep problems, school dysfunction, and childhood obesity. Make your child's bedroom a quiet sanctuary, free from electronic devices.

- **Avoid TV viewing for children under the age of two years.**

Research on early brain development shows that babies and toddlers have a critical need for direct interactions with parents and caregivers for healthy brain growth and the development of appropriate social, emotional, and cognitive skills. Therefore, young children should be discouraged from watching TV programs.

- **Limit screen time for older children.**

Limit screen time to 1 hour on school nights and 2 hours a day on weekends. Don't allow video gaming on weekdays/school days. Occasionally you may want to allow extra viewing time for special educational programs.

- **Be selective of the content your children watch.**

Choose TV programs for their moral and instructive value, not just for entertainment. Avoid programs that display disrespectful social relations or disharmonious parent-child relations. Watch TV with your child and discuss the content of the programming.

- **Don't use TV as a distraction or a baby-sitter for preschool children.**

Preschooler's viewing should be limited to special TV shows and occasional videotapes that are produced for young children. Because the difference between fantasy and reality is not clear for this age group, regular TV shows may cause fears.

- **Turn off the TV during meals.**

Family time is too precious to be squandered on TV shows. In addition, don't have the television always on as a background sound in your house. If you don't like a quiet house, try listening to music without lyrics.

- **Set a bedtime for your child that is not altered by TV shows that interest your child.**

Children who are allowed to stay up late to watch television are usually too tired the following day to remember what they were taught in school.

- **Install an Internet filter on all computers and other devices with Internet access.**

Internet filters are available for all computers. Some are free and others (with more sophistication) cost about \$50-60 for 3 devices in the home. Don't overlook the iPad, or iTouch. These have parental controls within the "Settings" that can limit or block Wifi Internet access.

- **Don't allow computers with Internet access in your child's bedroom.**

Computers, including laptops, should be placed and only used in public areas of the home, so that monitoring is easy. Computers or similar devices in your child's bedroom will allow unsafe exposure to the Internet and will interfere with your child's sleep routine.

In summary, some screen time for the older child can be an entertaining and educational experience. Limiting and monitoring your child's screen time and exposure to media will be beneficial to your child. As with most matters, too much of even a "good thing" can be detrimental.