General Guidelines for Parents

Children and Screens
INSTITUTE OF DIGITAL MEDIA AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Set Boundaries

- If kids are younger than 2, limit their TV exposure.[i] Don't let the TV play in the background if no one else is watching.
- Media diets should be rich in educational content, but heavy use of screen media should be discouraged.[ii]
- Turn off the TV and electronic media devices during schoolwork or learning.[iii]
- Discourage eating while watching TV or movies or playing video games.
- Don't allow your kids to play violent video games.[iv] At all times, limit scary or intense media.[v]
- Limit media use within 1–2 hours of bedtime.[vi] Plan a bedtime that allows for adequate sleep. Use a bedtime routine that includes calming activities and avoids electronic media.[vii]
- Make kids' bedrooms a "media-free" zone[viii]: Remove all electronic media, including phones, tablets, TVs, and laptops, from your children's rooms. Charge devices in a central location instead.[ix]
- To encourage family interaction, consider establishing other media-free zones, such as the dining table, restaurants, and cars.
- Establish firm rules about texting and driving and enforce them. Encourage your teens to set a good example for their friends by not using screens while driving.[x]
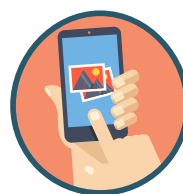
Monitor Use, Behavior, and Content

- Be proactive in monitoring your children's media use. For example, use passwords on TVs and computers to block violent or inappropriate shows and webpages.[xi] "Friend" or follow your children on social media to stay engaged.[xii]
- Watch and play the video games your children are playing to make sure the content is appropriate. Don't just rely on the ratings.[xiii]
- Keep TVs, computers, and video game consoles in public places.[xiv]
- Talk to the parents of your children's friends about not letting the kids play violent video games during visits.[xv]
- If your children show signs of depression, carefully monitor media use. Talk to a health care provider or mental health professional about how to make sure your children stay safe.[xvi]
- If you think your children show symptoms of addiction to the internet or video games, talk to a health care provider or therapist about what you can do.[xvii]
- If your children experience a problem online, such as bullying, work with them to contact the website or app maker about the problem. Notify your children's school, where the adults can keep an eye on interactions and support your children.[xviii]
- Encourage your children's school to use programs and materials designed to increase internet safety and reduce cyberbullying and online social conflict.[xix]
- Carefully monitor and (within reason) limit your children's exposure to advertising messages on the internet, on social networks, and on television.[xx]

Be Clear About What Is Acceptable

- Establish and enforce house rules about screen time, including when, where, how much, and what type of content is allowed.

- Avoid "technoference." Don't let media use interfere with family relationships—particularly at mealtimes, playtime, and bedtime. Pay attention to how media use affects your family dynamics.[xxi]

- Encourage your kids not to multitask with media if they're trying to learn or do homework. Have them use planned breaks instead to check texts or social media messages.[xxii]

- Make sure kids are using media for a specific purpose and not just by default. Balance their use with other important activities, like face-to-face interactions, physical activities, hobbies, schoolwork, and sleep.[xxiii]

- Discuss with your kids what is private and what is appropriate to share and not share online.

Engage and Lead by Example

- Obey your own house media rules to set a good example.

- Limit your own use of digital technology and TV around your kids, because it affects the length and quality of your time with them and sets an example.[xxiv]

- Talk regularly to your kids about their internet and social media use, including their profiles and whether they are experiencing any problems online. Know what sites they are using.

- Keep an ongoing, open dialogue about sexting and online pornography so kids will feel comfortable talking to you about inappropriate content or if they are being pressured to participate in sexting.[xxv]

- If your children tell you about problems they are having online, listen and be supportive.[xxvi]

- Interact with media and your young kids rather than letting them experience it alone to help them understand what they are seeing, just as you would while reading a traditional book.[xxvii, xxviii]

- Talk to your kids about what they see on TV, movies, games, and other media, as well as how media shapes how your kids see themselves and their future. Analyze together the stories and stereotypes you see, and seek out media that shows positive representations of diverse groups and healthy relationships.[xxix, xxx]

- Be a model digital citizen: Teach your kids how to be media literate and think critically about the information they access.[xxxi]

From the *Pediatrics* Supplement:

[i] Anderson, D.R., Subrahmanyam, K. Digital Screen Media and Cognitive Development.

[ii] Anderson, D.R., Subrahmanyam, K. Digital Screen Media and Cognitive Development.

[iii] Uncapher, M., et al. Media Multitasking and Cognitive, Psychological, Neural, and Learning Differences.

[iv] Anderson, C.A., et al. Screen Violence and Youth Behavior.

[v] Hoge, E., et al. Digital Media, Anxiety, and Depression in Children.

[vi] LeBourgeois, M.K., et al. Digital Media and Sleep in Childhood and Adolescence.

[vii] LeBourgeois, M.K., et al. Digital Media and Sleep in Childhood and Adolescence.

[viii] Hoge, E., et al. Digital Media, Anxiety, and Depression in Children.

[ix] LeBourgeois, M.K., et al. Digital Media and Sleep in Childhood and Adolescence.

[x] Atchely, P., Strayer, D.L. Small Screen Use and Driving Safety.

[xi] Anderson, C.A., et al. Screen Violence and Youth Behavior.

[xii] Hoge, E., et al. Digital Media, Anxiety, and Depression in Children.

[xiii] Anderson, C.A., et al. Screen Violence and Youth Behavior.

[xiv] Anderson, C.A., et al. Screen Violence and Youth Behavior.

[xv] Anderson, C.A., et al. Screen Violence and Youth Behavior.

[xvi] Hoge, E., et al. Digital Media, Anxiety, and Depression in Children.

[xvii] Gentile, D.A., et al. Internet Gaming Disorder in Children and Adolescents.

[xviii] Englander, E., et al. Defining Cyberbullying.

[xix] Englander, E., et al. Defining Cyberbullying.

[xx] Lapierre, M.A., et al. The Effect of Advertising on Children and Adolescents.

[xxi] Coyne, S.M., et al. Parenting and Digital Media.

[xxii] Uncapher, M., et al. Media Multitasking and Cognitive, Psychological, Neural, and Learning Differences.

[xxiii] Hoge, E., et al. Digital Media, Anxiety, and Depression in Children.

[xxiv] Anderson, D.R., Subrahmanyam, K. Digital Screen Media and Cognitive Development.

[xxv] Collins, R.L., et al. Sexual Media and Childhood Well-Being and Health.

[xxvi] Englander, E., et al. Defining Cyberbullying.

[xxvii] Anderson, D.R., Subrahmanyam, K. Digital Screen Media and Cognitive Development.

[xxviii] Coyne, S.M., et al. Parenting and Digital Media.

[xxix] Katz, V.S., Gonzalez, C., Clark, K. Digital Inequality and Developmental Trajectories of Low-income, Immigrant, and Minority Children.

[xxx] Dill-Shackleford, K.E., et al. Social Group Stories in the Media and Child Development.

[xxxi] Middaugh, E., Schofield Clark, L., Ballard, P.J. Digital Media, Participatory Politics, and Positive Youth Development.