

Screen Time

Limiting time spent with TV, computers and the Internet

Many children and adults spend hours in front of a screen. They watch TV or videos, play games and use the computer. This can be fun and, in some cases, educational, but make sure it doesn't take too much time from other activities or expose your child to harm. Here are some tips for keeping screen time safe and sound.

Too much screen time can:

- Interfere with developing a good self-concept and body image
- Take away from time talking and playing with family and friends
- Affect reading skills
- Cause attention span problems
- Glamorize violence
- Expose children to adult behaviors, such as sex, alcohol, tobacco and drug use
- Take the place of physical activity and lead to weight gain

Screen use tips

Limit entertainment screen time (TV, videos, games and Internet) to 1 to 2 hours per day. Use a kitchen timer to help keep track of time.

- Avoid TV for children under age 2. Choose activities that promote good brain growth, such as talking, playing, singing and reading.
- Involve your child in setting guidelines for choosing TV shows, games and computer activities. Use guides and ratings to help you, but beware of claims that a program is educational. Often times, there is no evidence to back such claims.

- Keep the TV off during meals.
- Set certain days as media-free, and plan other fun things to do. The books and Web sites at the end of this flyer have lots of ideas.
- Avoid using the TV or other screen entertainment as a reward.
- Turn off the TV when a chosen program is over. Record shows to watch later, and skip the ads.
- Watch TV with your child. Talk about what you see and how problems can be solved without violence.
- Keep TVs and computers out of children's bedrooms. Instead, keep them in a central place.
- Turn on the radio, music or books on tape instead of looking at a screen.
- Be a good role model and limit your own screen use.
- Teach children the purpose of advertising. Talk about unrealistic messages in ads.
- On newer TVs (since January 2000), use the V-chip to block out shows with sex and violence.

Internet safety

The Internet can open up a world of fun and learning, but it also provides access to information and people children should avoid. Here are some tips for Internet use:

- Use a filter to block sites you don't want your child to see. However, these aren't foolproof—you still need to supervise.

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Internet safety, continued

- Explain that people they meet online are not always who they say they are. Tell your child that what they read may not be true and what they write may not be private.
- If you don't know about computers or the Internet, ask your child to show you or go to the library and ask for help.

Teach children to:

- Never use a credit card or give out personal information unless you say it's OK. This includes: name, home address, phone number, age, race, family income, school name or address or friends' names.
- Never share their password, even with friends.
- Never meet face-to-face with someone they "meet" online, unless a parent goes with them to a public place.
- Tell a parent or another adult if they get e-mails that make them feel uncomfortable. Never answer those e-mails.
- Never use bad language or send mean messages online.
- Never copy information and claim it's their own, or copy software unless it is clearly marked "free."
- Know what kinds of sites you allow and why. Make sites off-limits if they are obscene, pornographic, violent, hate-filled, racist or offensive in other ways.

To learn more

The Parent's Guide to Protecting Your Children in Cyberspace

Aftab, Parry, 2000

Screen Smarts: A Family Guide to Media Literacy

DeGaetano, Gloria & Bander, Kathleen, 1996

Remote Control Childhood? Combating the Hazards of Media Culture

Levin, Diane, 1998

The Elephant in the Living Room: Make Television Work for Your Kids

Christakis, Dimitri A. and Zimmerman, Frederick J., 2006

Alternatives to the Screen

Family Fun Book: More than 400 Amazing, Amusing and All-Around Awesome Activities for the Entire Family!

Hilton, Joni, 1998

5,001 Things for Kids to Do

Kipfer, Barbara Ann, 2001

Simple Fun for Busy People

Krane, Gary, 1998

1,001 Things to Do with Your Kids and 1,001 More Things to Do with Your Kids

Waller Kruger, Caryl, 1988, 2000

Play and Learn

Editors of *Parents Magazine*, 2000

The Read-Aloud Handbook

Trelease, Jim, 2001

365 Days of Creative Play

(versions for infants to age 2 and children age 2 and up)

Ellison, Sheila and Gray, Judith, 1995

Web sites

www.tvturnoff.org

www.childrenspartnership.org

www.mediaandthefamily.org

www.metrokc.gov/health/reduceTV

www.maketvwork.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Children's Resource Line (206) 987-2500 or (866) 987-2500 toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- Your Child's Health Care Provider

Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call Marketing Communications at (206) 987-5205.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.