



Managing screens in your home.

If you've ever seen kids' eyes glaze over during the third hour of a cartoon marathon, or had to take away a device over pleas to "just let me finish this level," or "let me finish texting my friend" you have some idea why screen time is an issue.

These tips below can help you keep screen time under control, while making screen use a valuable part of your kids' lives. The information is based on the Canadian Paediatric Society's Position Statement "Screen time and young children: Promoting health and development in a digital world" and further work underway to develop a position on screen time and school-aged children.



Use screens **mindfully**, as an activity you choose, rather than as something that is on in the background or that you turn on as a habit.

- A big step in controlling media or screen time is becoming mindful of it. Turning on a TV, computer or mobile device should be something you do at particular times, for particular reasons: when you're not using them, they should be turned all the way off (not just on "sleep") and put away if possible. Make sure kids don't get in the habit of turning devices on as soon as they sit down and don't have TV screens on as "background noise."
- Get creative! It's not unusual for kids to get obsessed with the characters and settings in their favourite shows and games, and it doesn't have to be unhealthy. When screen time is over, encourage them to draw, write or act out stories about their favourite characters so they don't have to say goodbye when the screen goes dark. Older kids should also be encouraged to spend time engaging in activities that don't involve a screen – for instance, reading, cooking or participating in sports.



Model good media use for your kids.

- Before we can teach kids to use screens mindfully, we have to do it ourselves. Pay attention to your own media use, and think about what messages you're sending with it. You can also develop a family screen plan to show that managing screen time is important for everyone, not just kids.

- Think about ways to use screens together as a family, whether it's video chatting with distant friends and relatives or using the Internet to investigate hobbies and interests together.



Mitigate media effects by curating your children's media, setting household rules, and co-viewing when possible.

- With younger kids, select their media choices yourself, and only allow older kids to watch or play media you've approved. There can be worrying content in media for all ages, and for kids over two the quality of the content can make the difference between a positive and a negative viewing experience.
- Whenever possible, co-watch with your kids. Educational media is most effective when it's watched with parents who can help to extend and reinforce the learning content, and co-viewing is the best way to spot and talk about troubling content in media: [MediaSmarts' tip sheet Co-Viewing With Your Kids](#) can help you do this. When you can't watch together, make sure you're familiar with the content of everything your kids are watching and playing so you can talk to them about anything that worries you.
- For older kids, learn about the social media platforms they are using, create your own account and connect with them online. If they really like a game, have them teach you how to play, and enjoy the game with them so you are more informed and can help guide them should any problems arise.



Minimize screen use for young children

- Try to expose babies and toddlers to as little screen time as possible, whether it's TV and videos or interactive media like educational apps. (The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends no screen time for children under two). If you have older children as well, explain to them why they need to limit screen time around their younger siblings.
- Help kids understand from early on that using screens is a health issue, like eating well or brushing your teeth. Just like kids can understand that some foods are better than others and that too much of anything can be bad for you, they can learn to make good choices about screens.
- Set limits that include all screens and establish certain times and places as no-screen zones. Screens should stay out of bedrooms and away from the dinner table, and should be turned off and put away at least an hour before bedtime.



Maximize positive screen uses for older kids.

- With older kids and teens, think of screen time as being like food: some kinds are better than others, some should be avoided as much as possible, and too much of any is bad for you.
- It's important to understand, though, that in the last twenty years our media world has become a buffet: there used to be a limit of how much media was available, and when we could use it, but now there isn't.
- To tell the difference between a positive and negative screen activity, consider the three Cs:
 - **Content** – what's in it?

Is there violence, stereotyping, or other content that you need to mediate with your kids? Is there advertising or branded content? Do the ways the performers or

characters act (and the relationships between them) reflect how you want your kids to live? None of those add up to an automatic “no,” but they can mean you'll give less time for that activity than something that has more valuable or positive content.

- **Conduct** – what are your kids doing with it?

Is it creative or just passive? Are they making a genuine social connection (video-chatting with friends or family, making plans for offline activities with friends) or just sharing and liking other people's photos?

Keep in mind that all kids are different: something that's a positive activity for one may not be for another, so you have to think about how your kids use each game or app.

- **Context** - when and how are your kids using it?

Some times and places (like after bedtime, or while driving) should be completely off-limits. As your kids get older, tell them to think about what might go wrong if they do a screen activity in the wrong context: for example, checking your texts during class might get your phone confiscated, and might even get you a zero on a test if your teacher thinks you were cheating.

Keep in mind that many apps and games have features that make us want to use them more often, so talk to your kids about why they feel they need to spend more time on their devices, or to use them first thing in the morning or just before they go to bed (or why they feel like they need to have their phones with them in their bedrooms.)

Pay attention to how your kids react when you say it's time to turn devices off or put them away. If they have a hard time with that, it's probably a sign that they need to cut back or take a break entirely. And remember that it always works better to give kids something else to do instead of just saying “turn it off.”



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Created in partnership with MediaSmarts.

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