

Screen Time and Technology: How much is too much?

Youth today are immersed in a digital world. Smartphones, the internet, social networks and gaming draw youth of all ages into the ever-growing online world of communication and entertainment. According to a study by Pew Research Institute:

- 95% of all teens have access to a smart phone.
- 45% of teens say they are online “almost constantly”.
- YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are the most popular online platforms amongst teens ages 13-17.
- The average teenager has 18-24 apps on their phones.
- 90% of teens say they play video games of any kind (whether on a computer, game console or cellphone).



Additionally, many of our schools are tapping into the technology of electronic devices for educational tools. The internet has opened doors to avenues of learning that include online research, assignments, tests and digital presentations and projects. There is no doubt that technology comes with many benefits but it also comes with risks. As technology advances and accessing electronic devices becomes more necessary for children and teens, knowing how much is too much can be challenging for parents and educators.

Adults can help prevent excessive screen time and over use of technology by guiding children and teens to find a healthy balance. Just as we spend time teaching our kids how to ride a bike or drive a car, we also need to teach them the rules of safe social media, internet use, electronic communication and gaming. This is a new reality for educators and parents alike. Helping youth develop a healthy balance of screen time without using technology as an escape from real world challenges, emotions and socialization can be challenging. So how much is too much?

A healthy allotment of screen time is one that doesn't disrupt developmentally important parts of a child/adolescent's life including:

- Seeing friends and interacting with them in real life
- Participating in extracurricular activities they're excited about
- Keeping up with academic classes and doing homework
- Building positive relationships with family members
- Getting enough sleep

Without adult guidance, it can be easy for kids and teens to let their electronic use get out of control. Parents can positively influence children by educating youth about healthy screen time and technology use. Do your research and engage in regular conversations about phone use, apps, social media and gaming. Other strategies include:

- Creating “technology free zones” - the dining room can be a great place to establish a technology free zone, reserved for meals and family conversation. For children, keeping electronics out of bedrooms is also recommended to improve sleep habits.
- Establish times to unplug- meal times, an hour before bed, during family activities, etc.
- Role model healthy habits- youth often learn more by what you do than what you say. Parents can teach youth to create healthy habits by monitoring their own use and screen-time behaviors.
- Encourage physical activity- Help your children/teens find physical activities that they enjoy that enforce time away from their screens.

For additional tips on developing healthy technology use, tap into the resources below:

- <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>
- <http://www.connectsafely.org/>
- <http://www.cyberwise.org/>
- <https://cyberbullying.org>

References: The American Academy of Pediatrics; www.cyberwise.org; www.commonsensemedia.org; www.connectsafely.org;
Pew Research Institute