



Move well

What is screen time?

It is time spent using a device that has a screen such as:



Video games



Tablet/iPad®/
smartphone

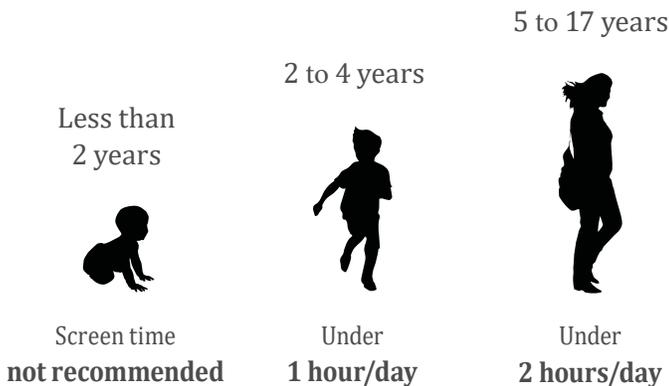


Computer/
laptop



TV/DVD

Canadian guidelines for recreational screen time*



There's nothing wrong with spending time in front of a screen, but too much screen time can keep kids from important childhood activities such as playing, learning to talk, reading, being active and spending time with friends and family. These guidelines are recommendations. Do your best and make goals that work for you and your family to help meet the recommendations. The less time spent in front of screens, the greater the benefit.

Limiting screen time is good for your family's health. It can help with:

Sleep

Screen time can affect sleep. Avoid screen use before sleep and try to keep screens out of the bedroom. Kids who get more screen time or who have a TV, computer or portable device in their bedrooms sleep less and fall asleep later at night. Even babies can be overstimulated by screens and miss the sleep they need to grow.

Development of language, learning and social skills

A young child needs to explore their surroundings and interact face-to-face with others. This is how their thinking, language, motor skills, social and emotional skills develop. Too much screen time early in life can delay that development. When you keep the TV on or focus on your own digital media, you can miss important chances to interact with your child and help him learn.

Controlling emotions

Avoid using media as the only way to calm your child. This could lead to problems with setting limits and may make it difficult for your child to learn how to control their emotions without it. Replace screen time with a story, lullaby or cuddle. Ask your health care provider if you need new strategies for calming your child.

Promoting healthy active living

Kids who use screens too often are less likely to be active with healthy, physical play. They will also see more advertising, including advertising for food. This can have an effect on the foods they want, like and choose.

Behaviour

What kids see on screens can play a role in behaviour problems and increased risky behaviours, such as violence, substance use and sexual behaviour, especially if what they see is not appropriate for their stage of development.

*Time spent in screen behaviours that are not related to school or work.

Healthy screen time habits

Set “screen-free” times

Keep mealtimes and playtime screen-free. Use this as time to connect with each other, to relax, find out how everyone’s day has been and to enjoy the meal. Choose a time of day to be “family time,” when no one is distracted by screens. Be positive, instead of saying “You can’t watch T.V.,” try “Let’s turn off the T.V. so we can...”.

Turn off the TV and other devices when not in use

Background media can distract from parent-child interaction and child play. These are very important for your child’s language and social-emotional development. If you need some quiet, down-time, have your child read a book, listen to music, or encourage them to write a story, draw, or create an art project.

Choose wisely

Look for quality programs, games and apps that are appropriate for the age and development of your child. Sites such as www.edululu.org, www.mpa-canada.org, and www.common sense media.org can help you to find age-appropriate movies, apps, shows, video games, and websites.

Get involved

Watch, play and listen with your child. Preview television shows, apps and video games before your child plays or watches them. When helping to choose content, pay attention to messages about gender, body image, violence, diversity and social issues. Explain why certain programs are not appropriate. This is a chance to share your own beliefs and values. Find out what shows, apps or games your child enjoys and why. Encourage them to talk about the media they use. When possible, co-view media with your child to help them learn from what they are doing, seeing, and saying online.

Make the connection between the screen and the real world

For younger children, make screen time interactive, talk about the content and connect it back to their real world. For example, if your child sees drumming on TV, place a real drum in their hands so they can mimic what they see. Or help them apply what they are learning from games, apps and TV shows—like letters, numbers and colours—to their every day activities. Name the letters on the signs you pass, count the apples at the grocery store or point out the colours of the clothes as you fold laundry together.

Avoid screen use 1 hour before bedtime and remove screens from bedrooms before sleep

Using screens before sleep can affect your child’s ability to get to sleep and stay asleep. Bedtime gives you a chance to spend some quality time with your child. Turn screens off and develop a relaxing routine together. Ideas include bath time, listening to music and reading.

Keep a balance

Encourage a balance between screen time and other activities like outdoor play, sports and hobbies. Think about some fun activities that do not involve a screen. Going for a walk, joining a sports team, drawing, painting or playing a board game are just a few examples of screen-free activities. Visit www.bringbackplay.ca (ParticipAction) for more activity ideas.

Be a role model

How much time do you spend using screens? Your child learns from your behaviour. Be a role model by limiting your own screen time each day. Put your device away while driving, at mealtimes and while connecting with your child.



For more ideas on how to reach for your best, visit www.sdhu.com.



Sudbury & District
Health Unit
Service de
santé publique