

Screen Sense: What You Need to Know About Screen Time

What is Screen Time?

Screen time can be described as time spent watching computers, TV, electronic games, phones, tablets or other visual devices for recreational or educational purposes.



Photo Source: Common Sense Media

How Does Screen Time Affect Children and Adolescent?

Screen time has been an increasingly prevalent issue for parents. Smart phones and tablets mean that screens are accessible anywhere – at school, car, outdoors, on shopping trips and more.

When parents take an active role in children's screen time, it can be beneficial for their growth and learning. However, too much screen time can affect children's development, such as their communication skills, social skills or healthy physical activity. There is no substitute for spending time reading, playing or connecting with your child. However, setting healthy limits with digital content and habits as they grow up will ensure that there are some ways to make TV, movies and computer games more meaningful for your child by being involved.

In a position statement by the Canadian Paediatric Society, research indicates that too much screen time is connected with challenges in language development, attention, sleep, emotions such as anxiety, fine motor skills, healthy physical activity and social skills. Behaviour concerns often are associated with too much screen time for these same reasons. The Canadian Paediatric Society emphasizes the importance of adults in being good role models in limiting their own screen time.

What is Screen Sense?

Screen sense refers to adults' responsibility to teach children to be aware of both the benefits, risks and healthy limits to screen time. Boundaries and discussions around healthy screen habits are essential to building healthy long-term habits with smart phones, computers, TV and other screens. Below are some recommendations for healthy expectations for your child.

Daily Recommendations By Age Physical Activity, Sleep and Screen Time



	3-4 Years Old	5-13 Years Old	14-17 Years Old
Physical Activity¹	180 minutes (any intensity)	60 minutes (high intensity)	60 minutes (high intensity)
Sleep¹	10-13 hours	9-11 hours	8-10 hours
Screen Time Limits^{1,2}	Less than 60 minutes	No more than 120 minutes of recreational screen time. Place consistent limits on time spent using media, and types of media. Make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviors essential to health. Always ensure you're aware of the content your child is accessing.	

¹24-Hour Movement Guidelines, Canadian Society of Exercise Physiology (2017)

²American Academy of Pediatrics (2016)

Ways to Adjust Screen Time At Home

Start discussions and set healthy limits using a family media plan.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Family Media Plan provide guidance on setting and enforcing rules and boundaries regarding media use based on child age. It provides ideas on how to create screen-free zones and device curfews in the home, as well as ways to balance online and offline activities to ensure that physical activity and family interactions are prioritized. It can be tailored to meet your family's needs.



Photo Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

Link: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/fmp/Pages/MediaPlan.aspx>

Find high quality programming.

Common Sense Media provides reviews about age-appropriate apps, games & programs to guide parents in making the best choices for their children. It's preferable that adults are present and engaged when screens are in use.

Link: <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

Know the facts about screen time and be present when your child is watching or using devices.

To make screen time beneficial, it must be used mindfully, in moderation and with adult supervision. For more information, read more on the Canadian Paediatric Society's Position Statement "*Screen time and young children: Promoting health and development in a digital world*".

Link: <https://cps.ca/en/documents/position/digital-media>

More Quick Tips

- Know what TV shows/computer games your child is watching/playing
- Designate screen-free areas in your home, such as bedrooms and dining table.
- Keep screens off or put away during meal times
- Be mindful of your screen habits. Limit your own TV, computer and phone use to set a good example.
- Set up ways of earning screen time (*Chores, homework, time being physically active, etc*), rather than making it a daily habit or expectation
- Avoid screens for at least 1 hour before bedtime.