Our ref: Student Wellbeing/LFo/

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Dear Parents/Guardians

What follows is an online article that we thought might be useful to share with you. We are all aware that smart phones, TV, electronic devices, social media, gaming, internet etc., play an important part in our children's lives and can, left unchecked, take up much of their time (as it can our own!)... But, should we let this be the case?

We hope you find this useful reading; please also find the direct link, for further information, at the foot of the article.

How much screen time is healthy for children?

New research reveals four on five parents believe gadgets aid their child's development, but how much screen time is healthy? Guidelines to reduce a child's screen time for health, psychological and educational benefits.

Guidelines for managing screen time for children.

By Simon Jary | 23 Feb 2018

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Screen time and children

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Many parents are under the belief that technology and gadgets are essential for a child's development, but can you go too far? How much time should a child spend in front of a screen is a question being asked not just by worried parents but psychologists, health organisations and even governments. Here, you can read a collection of experts' guidelines for managing a child's screen time, and their warnings and advice on the dangers of recreational screen time, especially before bedtime. (Also see: Is YouTube safe for kids?)

A recent TLF Panel survey conducted on behalf of kids clothing retailer Vertbaudet.co.uk found that four in five parents believe technology and gadgets are good for kids, aiding in their development. The study found that 37 percent of parents asked said that their child spent between one and two hours a day playing with tech gadgets, and 28 percent said between two- and three hours.

The UK government's Commons Science & Technology Committee has announced an inquiry into the impact of social media and screen-use on young people's health. And Unicef has published a review on the effects of digital technology on children's psychological wellbeing, including happiness, mental health and social life. This suggested that some screen time could be good for children's mental wellbeing, but that too much had a negative impact.

In the US the average age for kids getting a phone is 10.

Here we look at the **positive** and **negative** effects of screen time, and how it can affect academic results and even lead to non-screen addictions later in life. We look at establishing rules for children, and how we need to follow these ourselves as parents. Screen breaks are important, and there are apps that can help you reduce screen time. After all this advice we recommend your read our shorter **Parents and Children's Screen Time guidelines** at the end of this feature.

See also Online safety: How to keep children safe online and check out our online safety tips for parents.

The reason behind all this gadget use: over a third of parents (35 percent) said they use tech gadgets to entertain their children because they are convenient, and nearly a quarter (23 percent) because they want their children to be tech-savvy. A 2015 survey of 1,000 British mothers of children aged 2 to 12 found that 85 percent of mums admit to using technology to keep the kids occupied while they get on with other activities. The AO.com survey pointed to children spending on average around 17 hours a week in front of a screen – almost double the 8.8 weekly hours spent playing outside.

Wanting our children to be tech-savvy is understandable, and the need to keep them entertained (while we work or just tidy up after them!) will also make sense to many a parent. But we must also weigh up the risks associated with children having too much screen time.

In his lecture 'Managing Screen Time and Screen Dependency' Dr Aric Sigman argues that "whether it's Facebook, the internet or computer games, screen time is no longer merely a cultural issue about how children spend their leisure time, nor is it confined to concern over the educational value or inappropriate content – it's a medical issue".

Sigman is concerned less with a child's ICT or Computer Science study or use of computers for homework, but more with their screen time in non-educational environments in front of entertainment screen media such as television, the internet and computer games. He has some strong recommendations for reducing children's screen time, from toddlers to teenagers – and adults, too.

Obviously he is less worried by educational television programmes and even some educational computer games or mobile apps, but still recommends strictly limiting all screen time for kids.

TV has been an easy "babysitter" for years now, aided even further with DVDs, Netflix and so on. But computer, tablet and mobile screens engender more worry, in what has been put down as merely the latest generational complaint – "fresh expressions of horrible and timeless anxieties ... a tried and true form of advanced-age self-care".

The current generation of children in most Western societies spends more time in front of a screen than any before it. A study back in 2010 – before even the phenomenal rise of Apple's iPad and other tablets – estimated that by the age of 10 children had access to an average of five screens in their lives. That number, Sigman suggests, has almost certainly risen since.

In addition to the main family TV, for example, many young children have their own bedroom telly along with portable computer game consoles (Nintendo, PlayStation, Xbox), smartphone, family computer and a laptop and/or a tablet computer.

By the age of seven the average child will have spent a full year of 24-hour days watching recreational screen media, claims Sigman. Over the course of childhood, children spend more time watching TV than they spend in school.

More screens mean more consumption, and more medical problems argues Dr Sigman.

Screen time effect on academic grades

In 2015 Cambridge University researchers recorded the activities of more than 800 14-year-olds and analysed their GCSE results at 16. Those spending an extra hour a day on screens (TV, computer, games console, phone) saw a fall in GCSE results equivalent to two grades overall.

On average, the 14-year-olds said they spent four hours of their leisure time each day watching TV or in front of a computer.

An additional hour of screen-time each day was associated with 9.3 fewer GCSE points at 16 - the equivalent of dropping a grade in two subjects. Two extra hours of screen-time was associated with 18 fewer points - or dropping a grade in four subjects. Even if pupils spent more time studying, more time spent watching TV or online, still harmed their results, the analysis suggested.

Establish screen time rules for the whole family

So how much screen time is healthy for a 7 year-old, 10 year old, even 1, 2 or 3 year old? How much TV should a child watch? How many hours in front of a computer? You may be be shocked at too how much time in front of a screen has an adverse effect on a child's health and development.

Parents who want to reduce their children's screen time need to **establish rules** to reduce the risk of later health and psychological issues.

Sigman admits that there is a lack of clarity of advice, but points to a number of governmental advice points on the maximum amount of time a child should spend in front of a screen.

In 2013 the US Department of Health recommended that children under two years of age should not be in front of a screen at all, and over that age the maximum leisure screen time should be no more than two hours a day.

The French government has even banned digital terrestrial TV aimed at all children under three, while Australia and Canada have similar recommendations and guidelines.

Harvard clinical psychologist and school consultant, Catherine Steiner-Adair (author of _The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age_) has studied the impact of digital technology on infant brain development. A baby's brain is hardwired to learn language, emotions and how to regulate them. Steiner believes there is no productive role technology can play in the life of a baby under two years.

Taiwanese parents are now legally obligated to monitor their children's screen time. The Taiwanese government can levy £1,000 fines on parents of children under the age of 18 who are using electronic devices for extended periods of times. Similar measures exist in China and South Korea that aims to limit screen time to a healthy level.

The UK government has recently backtracked on a 2008 guidance that children should be exposed to technology and computers from a very young age, but there is currently no medical or governmental guidelines on screen time in the UK. The advice from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) is that children should have TV-free days, or have two-hour limits on the time spent in front of screens.

Ofcom in the UK estimates that the average 3-4-year-old spends three hours a day in front of a screen. This rises to four hours for ages 5-7, 4.5 hours by ages 8-11, and 6.5 hours for teenagers.

The report also found that older children are spending more time online and are more likely to go online alone, children aged 12-15 are spending more time online (rising from 14.9 hours a week to 17.1 hours) and spend as much time in a week using the internet as they do watching television. Up to 43 percent of kids are also more likely to mostly use the internet in their bedrooms.

Children who use the internet mostly alone comprise one in seven internet users aged 5-7 (14%), one in four aged 8-11 (24%) and over half of those aged 12-15 (55%).

Children are going online via a wider range of devices. Internet access using a PC or laptop is increasingly being supplemented by access through other devices. All age groups are more likely in 2012 to go online using a tablet computer, and children aged 5-7 and 12-15 are also more likely to go online using a mobile phone.

It's telling that Apple's Steve Jobs didn't allow his kids to play with iPads at all. Steve was a bit of an extremist, but limiting screen time should be at the front of every parent's mind – and that includes their own screen time in front of children. And Bill Gates of Microsoft capped video-game time for his daughter.

Steiner-Adair found that babies showed signs of distress when they looked to a parent for a reassuring connection and discovered the parent is distracted by technology. Her research found that 70 percent of kids think their parents spend too much time on devices, and accuse their parents of double standards.

Two of Apple's largest shareholders recently called on the tech giant to develop software that limits how long children can use its smartphones.

Parents know that to establish rules for their children they need to be roles models too. So that means putting your phone down when around the kids, and trying not to eat every meal in front of the TV. You can't lecture a child about screen time if you are getting too much too!

We should look out for "technology-based interruptions in parent–child interactions" – a phenomenon known as "technoference", which seems to correlate with children being more prone to whining, sulking, restlessness, frustration and outbursts of temper.

Introduce frequent screen breaks

Dr Larry Rosen, psychology professor at California State University says that it's more important to limit the stretches of time children spend in front of screens rather than worry about the total amount each day. Frequent breaks stop the brains from becoming over stimulated and combat screen addiction. Kids need to switch off without stress.

Rosen suggests a limit of 40 minutes then an hour's break for under 10s. For older pre-teens that should be a maximum of an hour, then an hour off. For teenagers it should be a maximum of an hour and a half.

Give kids a five-minute warning before their allotted time is up, and take away future screen time if they don't switch off. You can give bonuses for good screen behaviour but be aware that this goes against the overall message of moderation so use it sparingly.

Apps to limit screen time for kids

There a few apps that parents can install to actually limit the time their children spend on a computer and/or mobile screen.

British-based **ScreenLimit** is the only cross-platform/device (iOS, Android, Amazon Kindle Fire, and Windows) solution that we've seen. ScreenLimit lets parents remotely manage their children's screen time from a smartphone, tablet or web browser. Each child has a daily time limit (shown via a countdown) that allows them to switch between multiple devices on the same timer ensuring that they can't use more screen time than they've been allocated. Read more in our Best Parental Control Software round up.

Using ScreenLimit children can also earn extra screen time by completing set tasks (eg. brushing teeth, cleaning room, making bed, etc) as well as being penalised for less happy events. Devices and apps can be blocked with one click. Educational apps and websites can be whitelisted so they don't use up the child's precious screen time allocation. ScreenLimit is currently in beta version but can be downloaded now; you can try it for free for 1,000 active minutes, and later buy for £2.99/month or an annual or lifetime price. One subscription for a family covers up to 10 children on unlimited devices. More details at ScreenLimit.

Other screen-limiting apps include **OurPact** (a parental control app for iPhones, iPads, and iPods) and **Screen Time** (iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, Android and Kindle Fire).

The <u>Monqi kids smartphone</u> is designed to give parents the chance to see what their child is up to.

Source:

<u>https://www.techadvisor.co.uk/feature/digital-home/how-much-screen-time-for-kids-3520917/</u>

Kind regards,

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Designated Safeguarding & Child Protection Officer