

## Screen time: What's recommended

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According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children shouldn't be exposed to media before they're 18 months old, and then only under strict supervision. They should only watch high-quality programming made for their age group.

Those aged two to five shouldn't have more than an hour of screen use a day. Again, it should be age-appropriate and high quality. School-aged children and older should balance media use with other healthy behaviour, it advises.

The new guidelines by the Chief Medical Officers outline some clear boundaries that should be set throughout the day, particularly around meal times and before bed:

### **Sleep matters**

Getting enough, good quality sleep is very important. Leave phones outside the bedroom when it is bedtime.

### **Sharing sensibly**

Talk about sharing photos and information online and how photos and words are sometimes manipulated. Parents and carers should never assume that children are happy for their photos to be shared. For everyone – when in doubt, don't upload!

### **Education matters**

Make sure you and your children are aware of, and abide by, their school's policy on screen time.

### **Keep moving!**

Everyone should take a break after a couple of hours sitting or lying down using a screen. It's good to get up and move about a bit.

### **Safety when out and about**

Advise children to put their screens away while crossing the road or doing an activity that needs their full attention.

### **Talking helps**

Talk with your children about using screens and what they are watching. A change in behaviour can be a sign they are distressed – make sure they know they can always speak to you or another responsible adult if they feel uncomfortable with screen or social media use.



## Screen time: The dangers of over-exposure

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Devices like smartphones, tablets and TVs have many advantages for kids. They make them more informed about the world, help them stay in touch with their friends meaning they're more active socially, and playing games can help them develop their motor skills. But they also have their drawbacks.

[\[Read more: WhatsApp: What is it and how to use it safely?\]](#)

Children can come under pressure through social media to look or behave a certain way. They can also be exposed to advertising or unsuitable content. And far from encouraging them to socialise, too much time spent in a room staring at a screen can do just the opposite and harm their social development.

Other potential side effects include disrupted sleep, not enough exercise and the danger of neglecting schoolwork. According to one [study](#), children who watched TV for more than two hours a day had higher blood pressure, which is linked to health problems like cardiovascular disease later in life.

The good news is that most families have the issue under control. According to Ofcom\*, almost two-thirds of children aged 12-15 and their parents think the child has a good balance between screen time and doing other things. But for those who don't, help is at hand.

[\[Read more: 12 tips to stop oversharing\]](#)

## How to limit your child's screen time

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[Internet Matters](#) has some tips to help you manage your children's screen time.

1. It's important to set a good example with your own device use. Children will model their behaviour on you, so make sure you're not glued to a screen every time they see you.
2. Talk to them about the amount of time they spend online and what they spend that time doing.
3. Agree on an appropriate amount of time they can use their device. These limits could well help adult members of the family too!
4. Get the whole family to unplug together and create screen-free zones of the house, such as bedrooms or the dinner table. This will encourage kids to talk more and not be absorbed in a device all the time.
5. Technology can help. **BT's Parental Controls** let you set times when kids can't get online, so they can focus on doing their homework. (Click here to **activate BT Parental Controls**.) There are other options, too. For example, the **Forest** app lets kids grow a beautiful forest in return for keeping their phone use within the set limit.

Be sensible and exercise some common sense and you'll set your kids up for a far healthier relationship with technology that will stand them in good stead later in their lives

## What can parents do to help?

### Read these tips from Parent Info

'Knowing what it is that keeps your child in a game can help with the discussions about managing their game time,' advises Richard Graham.

If your child is playing more than you think is good for them:

- Set specified times for them to play. Rather than cutting them off mid-game when that time has elapsed (this would leave them with a genuine grievance if they are mid-match on FIFA, for example!) give them a countdown to turning off the console so they can finish what they are doing. Offer them a 10 minute warning, then a five minute warning before they have to finish.
- Do a deal that you will let them play once they have completed specific tasks, eg: cleaning their room, clearing the table, going outside and playing football, doing their homework etc. Then set a curfew for when they must finish.
- Persuade them to remove all devices from their bedrooms overnight, including phones and tablets, so they can't play for hours on end without you knowing.
- Encourage them to find other interests, outside gaming, with you, with friends, or on their own.
- Lead by example. When your children are having screen-free time, put your devices down too.