

Managing Screen Time

As the use of electronic devices and media becomes more commonplace in our world, children are exposed to screens at earlier and earlier ages. It is important for parents to understand the effects of digital media and electronic device use, and to set appropriate boundaries from inception. Excessive screen time and exposure to poor quality content has been linked to several problems in childhood such as obesity, problems with sleep, poor learning, inattention and difficulty focusing, aggression and delays in the development of language and social skills.

Encouraging Appropriate Behaviours & Promoting Alternative Activities

At some time, children will be exposed to online environments that you have not selected or approved as their parent. This may be in the form of group chats and social media. It is therefore important to instruct children at an early stage about the possible dangers of use, the consequences of inappropriate use, and the type of behaviours that you as a parent consider to be appropriate.

Children should be educated that sharing personal information, 'sexting', and cyberbullying can have dire consequences to them and others in the real world. It may sound dramatic, but let them know that things shared online do not simply disappear, and they should therefore not share anything online that they are not comfortable with their family, future employers or friends seeing for the rest of their lives. Remember as well that children learn best by example, so parents should ensure that their own use of digital spaces is what they would like their children to follow.

Digital Literacy: Parents should also teach their children digital literacy, ensuring that they know how to tell if a website is legitimate, that they understand that online media is created by persons with agendas and points of view, and that some content is designed to influence them to think or behave in a certain way, e.g. buy an item or believe content to be true.





Alternative Activities: Children often complain of boredom as soon as devices are switched off, and it is important to promote activities that are engaging and educational. Spending time outdoors, physical activity, playing games as a family, reading, volunteering and face-to-face time with family and friends can be considered for older children and adolescents.

Spend Time and Set the Example: Examples set by parents go a long way towards influencing children's behaviour, and it is unreasonable to expect them to unplug while you scroll constantly and ignore them. Being present and involved in their lives as much as possible is the most important alternative to screen time.

