

# Managing Screen Time



## Key Vocabulary

### screen time

The amount of time spent in front of a digital device, whether it's a computer, cellphone, tablet, or television.

## Introduction

For parents raising kids a decade ago, managing screen time could be as simple as putting the television in the family room and clicking the power button when it was time to move on to another activity. Today, devices are increasingly used in school settings to support learning, and in many other places outside of the home. Plus, the sheer number of apps and devices — and the fact that many are completely mobile — can make managing kids' screen time seem like a nearly impossible feat.

Although technology has a tremendous amount to offer, too much time in front of screens can interfere with kids getting enough sleep at night or may even cause them to struggle in school or in social situations.

Monitoring screen time is especially important for parents of younger kids: The American Association of Pediatricians actually recommends a limit of 2 hours of screen time a day for kids aged 2-18, and suggests no screen time for kids under 2. Of course, these guidelines may or may not make sense for *your* family. So, what are the reasons for these guidelines, and how can you figure out how to adapt and adopt rules that make sense for your family?

Today's case focuses on how to effectively manage kids' screen time. In Part 1, you will read Dr. Mark Berin's article "Putting your kids on a healthy media diet." In the article, Dr. Berin highlights recent research studies on kids and screen time. In Part 2, you will take a critical look at one commercial that advertises a device with a built-in function for screen time limits. The commercial paves the way for a conversation about different approaches for parenting screen time.



## The Case: Part 1

### "Putting your kids on a Healthy Media Diet" Mark Berin, M.D. (October 29, 2014)<sup>1</sup>

There's an interesting article winding up in parent's e-mailboxes these days containing an unexpected implied message from late Apple founder Steve Jobs: Manage your child's use of technology. A stunned *New York Times* reporter remarked "So, your kids must love the iPad?" and apparently Jobs replied that this, well, was not quite the case. "They haven't used it," Jobs replied. "We limit how much technology our kids use at home."

Screen time seems to be taking over childhood. One estimate puts combined exposure at an incredible 7.5 hours a day for kids ages 8-18. **Surveys show that 72 percent of children go to bed at night in a room with at least one type of screen at their disposal.** Hopefully, Jobs' intuitive remark is helping get the message through to parents: For their own well-being, we must monitor and educate children about how to use technology well.

### **A Cascade of Negativity**

Study after study suggests that excessive screen time is associated with various negative outcomes. Topping the list: obesity, poor academic performance, aggressive behaviors, attention problems, lack of social skills, and inadequate sleep. **Having electronics in the bedroom, including television or a cell phone, may rob a child of an hour of much-needed sleep a night.** Too much media time potentially displaces other healthy pursuits including physical, social, creative or academic activities.

Now, **a new study out of the University of California suggests that the amount of time kids devote to technology may inhibit their ability to recognize emotion.** The study, published in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*, found sixth-graders who went cold turkey on technology during a five-day camp trip became significantly better at reading facial expressions and with other nonverbal skills than a similar group who carried on life as usual, attached to smartphones, iPads, computers, and television.

This type of research is a wake-up call for parents as well as educators. The capacity to effectively process emotional cues is essential to personal, social, and educational success. As a species, we evolved to become productive social beings through face-to-face interaction. There is already plenty of research regarding what children do and do not learn about the social world through media, and evidence suggests that most kids learn better from live interaction than from screens.

### **Using Technology, or Used By It?**

This is not to put the kibosh on technology. When used appropriately, it is wonderful. It's part of our lives and will continue to be. We just have to make sure our children (and parents, too) use it in a considered, sensible way. When we monitor both screen time and content, children develop healthy, productive relationships with this growing part of our modern lives.

Recent research, reported in *JAMA Pediatrics*, shows that **parental guidance around media does work. In fact, that one variable alone has a positive result on multiple aspects of child development.** The study, which involved more than 1,300 third- and fourth-graders, demonstrated that "parental monitoring of media has protective effects on a wide range of academic, social, and physical child outcomes."

While more and more technology makes achieving this end a big challenge, it can be done. **The American Academy of Pediatrics prescribes that total screen time for children 2 to 18 be limited to two hours a day. It also recommends none at all for younger children.** Whatever works for an individual home, creating common-sense, firm boundaries around media is a concrete step parents can take to help children thrive. (...)

## Consider

- Is any information in Dr. Berin's article new or surprising to you?
- What are the biggest challenges to monitoring your kids' screen time?
- What do you think about the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines? Why do -- or why don't -- they seem appropriate?
- Does the quality of the content or the type of screen-time activity change the conversation? If so, how?
- How do you monitor screen time during play dates at your home? At others' homes?
- Do you think screen-time rules should be different for older versus younger kids? How might you change your parenting approach as your kids get older?

## The Case: Part 2

Watch the commercial for the Kindle Fire HD. (We recommend you watch it twice, since it's only 30 seconds!)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiw1npOWpW0>



## Consider

- What is your immediate reaction to the commercial?
- What do you see as one positive and one negative outcome of this type of technology feature?
- What messages about parenting and technology are reflected in the commercial?
- The narrator says, "FreeTime ... lets you set limits on how your kids watch and play, and lets them know when their time's up ... so *you* don't have to." As a parent, does this idea make you feel comforted or unsettled?
- Screen time is an important part of the equation, but it's only one component of monitoring kids' media use. Do you have any rules in your house about media diets other than just screen time?

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Read the full article at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-bertin-md/putting-your-kids-on-a-he\\_b\\_6053570.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-bertin-md/putting-your-kids-on-a-he_b_6053570.html)