



Screen time for a healthy lifestyle

Screen time and digital technology use for children: part of a healthy lifestyle

Screen time and digital technology use can be part of a healthy lifestyle when they're balanced with other activities that are good for your child's development. These activities include physical play, outdoor play, creative play, reading and socialising with friends and family. Getting the right balance also includes making sure screen time doesn't interfere with sleep.

Our tips can help you encourage your child to use digital technology in balanced and healthy ways.

1. Make rules about screen time and digital technology use

You can help your child balance screen time and digital technology use with other activities. One of the best ways to do this is by working together on family rules or a family media plan. Your rules and plan will work best if they apply to everyone in the family, including you.

From the Counsellor

You and your child could talk about family rules that cover things like the following:

Where your child can use digital technology – for example, this might be only in shared open spaces like the family room, but not in the car or bedroom.

When your child can use digital technology – for example, mealtimes are free of TV, computers and phones, or no screens before school or until chores are finished.

How your child can use digital technology – for example, this might be for making animations or checking a netball shooting technique, but not for playing Candy Crush.

How you handle digital technology use for children of different ages – for example, there might be some games that your older child can play only when their younger sibling is out or has gone to bed.

How your child can stay safe online – our articles on [internet safety for children](#) and [internet safety for pre-teens](#) can help you with inappropriate content, privacy and location settings, personal data safety and more.

It's OK if your rules include time limits to help your child balance screen time with other things like physical activity. For example, it might help to know that [Australian physical activity guidelines](#) say school-age children should have at least one hour a day of moderate to vigorous physical activity like running or jumping.

From the Counsellor

2. Aim for short screen time sessions

It's good for your child to have short screen time sessions and take regular breaks, especially if they're sitting or lying down while watching or playing. This is important for your child's energy levels, development, sleep, and overall health and wellbeing.

Before your child starts watching or playing, you could talk together about options for keeping screen time short. These might include:

- using a timer to set breaks
- doing something active when the timer ends, like playing outside
- using natural breaks – for example, doing a victory dance when your child finishes a level in a game.

From the Counsellor

3. Get your child moving, especially outside

It's a good idea to encourage your child to play outside several times a day.

At this age, outdoor play can include:

- building and creating with equipment, furniture or other things they find outside
- playing tiggy, chasey or tag
- playing with balls, like kicking or shooting goals
- climbing trees.
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Active play and physical activity for school-age children can happen indoors too. It can be simple things like dancing, doing star jumps, shaking their body, or throwing and catching balls.

4. Imagine and create

Creative activities like telling stories, dressing up or drawing are good for your child's development. Activities like these help your child learn how to experiment, think, learn and solve problems.

Reading and storytelling with your child promotes brain development and imagination, teaches your child about language and emotions, and strengthens your relationship with your child.

5. Encourage play and friendship with others

When children play face to face with others, they develop **important life skills**. These include getting along with other people, making and maintaining friendships, being independent and learning how to sort out conflicts and problems. Face-to-face play also helps your child feel a sense of belonging.

You can support your school-age child's friendships by arranging playdates and sleepovers.

6. Avoid screen time and digital technology use before bed

School-age children need plenty of sleep – **9-11 hours a night**.

Screen time and digital technology use before bed can affect how quickly your child falls asleep and how well they sleep. If your child avoids mobile phones, tablets, computer screens or TV in the hour before bed, your child is likely to get to sleep more quickly and sleep better.

7. Keep digital technology out of bedrooms at night

If you keep mobile phones and other devices out of your child's bedroom at night, your child won't be able to stay up late playing games or messaging friends. This can also stop your child being disturbed in the night by messages or notifications.

When you help your child choose good apps, games, TV, movies and online videos as well as balancing screen time with other activities, your child will learn to make good choices about using free time when they're older.

Source:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/entertainment-technology/screen-time-healthy-screen-use/healthy-screen-time-6-11-years>

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