

MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER)

SCREEN TIME LIMITS FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP
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In last month's edition of Mental Health TidBIT, we talked about sleep hygiene and how to help your children get a better night's sleep. One tip we discussed was decreasing screen time and eliminating phone use in bed; however, how do we set screen time limits for our children? How do we know when our children are spending too much time using their electronics? This month we would like to provide you with information and tips on how and when to implement screen time rules for your children.

How to know when your child's screen time is concerning?

If you answer "yes" to each of the following questions, your child may not have an issue with screen time usage.

- Does your child get adequate sleep and exercise?
- Do they spend quality time with their friends?
- Do they enjoy non-screen time activities and hobbies?
- Are they keeping up with their schoolwork and maintaining their grades?

If you answered "no" to any of the questions, it may be a sign that screen time limits should be implemented. The following are tips to help set screen time limits for your children.

- **Start with empathy.** Let your child know that you understand that screen time is their method of relaxation and that you do not want to eliminate it completely.
- **Use screen time as a reward.** Screen time can be offered as an incentive for good behavior.
- **Brainstorm alternatives.** Figure out together what types of non-screen time activities they can participate in and assist with planning those activities.
- **Keep a schedule.** For example: 30 minutes of screen time after homework is completed or 15 minutes before dinner.
- **Model healthy screen time use.** Following your own screen time schedule and limits will make it more likely your children will stick with limits set for them. Additionally, decreased screen time may lead to less stress for you as well as increased connections and time spent with your children.
- **Emphasize connections with others.** Using screen time to connect with friends and family via face time or other video platform is a great use of time for both you and your child.

Try your best to stick to the rules but know your children may try to test boundaries. The following are tips to help stay on track.

- **Keep it simple**-Detailed explanations and arguments are unlikely to matter to your child. Arguing will only lead to further stress. Let them know your rules are not up for discussion.
- **Stay the course**-Your child may tell you that if they do not have time on their phone, they will be left out of something. Remember that limiting screen time will not cause any harm to your child.
- **Timing is important**-Do not implement new screen time rules when a lot of other changes are occurring for your child.
- **Reevaluate if needed**-Take notice to any changes you may see for the positive and negative. After a couple of weeks, evaluate the situation. Have your child's grades improved? Do they sleep better at night? Adjust your plan as needed.

Excerpted from: <https://childmind.org/article/screen-time-during-the-coronavirus-crisis>