

Screen time

can be described as the **number of hours per day** spent viewing TV/video, computer, electronic games, hand-held devices or other visual devices.



Screen use in modern times

In the age of home-based learning, screens are pervasive in our childrens' lives. Screen use expectations need to be calibrated to account for this.

Our recommendations are focused on control of recreational screen time outside the classroom.



Future considerations

While this leaflet provides recommendations for screen use in children up to age 6, it is important to **continue to ensure proper oversight of screen use** as your child enters primary school.

For example, limit recreational screen time to <2 hours per day.



Suggestions & Alternatives

Agree within the family and other caregivers what your child's **maximum daily screen time** should be and stick to it.



Explain to your child about your screen time limit and what consequences there would be if the limit is exceeded.



Expose your child to a **variety of activities**, both digital and non-digital (e.g. board games, arts & craft).

Play **cooperative games** with your child to teach teamwork skills, while also having some fun family-bonding time.



Where possible, **watch videos/shows with your child** and **discuss lessons learnt.**

Set a good example amongst the adults in the household. Limit your own screen time, especially when interacting with your child. Avoid watching or playing violent and other inappropriate content while children are present.



Impacts of Excessive Screen Use

Behavioural

Research has shown that excessive screen use, including background screen exposure, can lead to 'overstimulation' of your child, or sensory overload. This can lead to poor focus and attention span, decreased energy, and challenging/difficult behaviour.

In children <5 years old, studies have shown that **>2 hours of screen time/day** is associated with **7.7x chance of being diagnosed with attention disorders** (e.g. ADHD).

Developmental

Excessive screen time at a young age has shown to impair social and cognitive development, due to:

- Less exposure to social cues
- Language delays and poorer language acquisition

The prevalence of childhood myopia (short sightedness) in Singapore is among the highest in the world. **65% of our children are myopic by Primary 6.**

Check for **signs of myopia**, such as:

- Squinting
- Holding screens/books very close to the face



Use the **20-20-20 rule**:



Recommendations for Healthy Screen Usage

The **Ministry of Health advisory "Guidance on Screen Use for Children"** recommends:

<18 mo

No screen time
except for video-calling

18 mo to 6yrs

<1 hr screen use daily
co-viewing preferred, choose interactive & educational content

7-12 yrs

Make a collaborative screen use plan
appropriate balance between screen use and other age-appropriate activities

Not all screen time is bad!

In the digital age, almost all learning and social interaction involves a screen. The key lies in achieving balance! Below are some tips on how to ensure healthy screen usage.

Socialising

- When video calling, encourage visual and verbal communication
- Watch shows that teach social reasoning

Did you know?

Screen time should be of high quality, in order to be beneficial. To determine this, ask yourself:

Is it **engaging** or **distracting**?

Does it **actively encourage** your child to **explore more**?

Can your child **talk about what he/she sees**?

Is the content **meaningful**?
(e.g. a positive message)

Eating

Watching television when eating stops children from realising when they are full, which could result in overeating.

- Avoid screens during meals (including background TV)
- Put away your own devices as well, so as not to distract your child



Sleep

Screen based light increases alertness at night, and causes insomnia in children.

- Avoid screens within 1 hour of bedtime
- Keep screen devices out of the bedroom, so as not to disrupt sleep

Physical Activity

With more screen use, children tend to spend less time on physical activity.

- Play screen-based games that encourage physical activity
- Set aside time for your child to engage in non-digital exercise



Did you know?

Muscle and bone strengthening exercises (e.g. skipping and running) are critical for physical development.