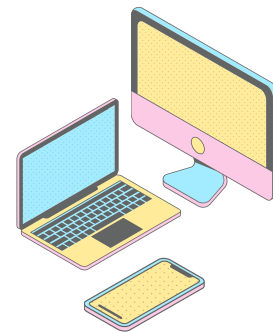# Healthy Screen Use for Young Children

Screen time is 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.

Impacts of Excessive Screen Use

Behavioural

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
- Challenging/difficult behaviour

Myopia

Myopia can be aggravated by **higher screen use**. Take these steps against it!

Check for **signs of myopia**, such as:
- Squinting
- Holding screens/books very close to the face

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

For every **20 minutes** spent using a screen,

Look away at an object that is at least **20 feet (6m)** away,

For at least **20 seconds**

Developmental

Impaired **social and cognitive development**, due to:
- Less exposure to social cues
- Language delays and poorer language acquisition

Recommendations for Healthy Screen Use

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 between different screen time types. 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**?

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 hopping) are critical for physical development.

Suggestions and Alternatives

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

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

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

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 inappropriate content while children are present.

Future considerations

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.