



Screen Use in Young Children



What is screen use?

Advances in technology have transformed media and its role in the lives of infants and young children. Increasingly, children are exposed to media from a younger age and have longer screen time exposure. Screen use is the use of devices with screens such as televisions, smartphones, tablets, computers, and gaming consoles.

Screen use is unavoidable in the lives of the children and adults. While it may not be realistic to expect zero screen time, we can help our children engage in appropriate and safe screen use.

Are there different types of screen use?

Screen usage can be categorised into 2 main types: active and passive.

- + Active screen use involves being physically or mentally engaged in screen-based activities (e.g. video chatting).
- + Passive screen use entails sedentary viewing, where children receive information without thinking or interacting, and often without adult supervision. This type of passive screen use is associated with detrimental effects on a child's development.

In general, active screen use is preferred over passive screen use.



What are the screen use recommendations by age group?

- Under 18 months**
- Screen use should be avoided. An exception can be made for interactive video calls.
 - Do not leave screens on in the background.
- 1.5 to 6 years old**
- As much as possible, screen use should be limited to less than 1 hour a day outside school.
 - Co-view media with the child and engage him/her in discussions to foster understanding of the content being watched. Avoid using screens just to occupy or distract your child.
 - Select high-quality educational content that is age-appropriate for the child. Choose content based on its ratings and age recommendations. Avoid content with violence, explicit language or mature themes that may not be suitable for your child.
 - Do not leave screens on in the background.
- 7 to 12 years old**
- Limit screen use to less than 2 hours daily, unless related to school work.
 - Agree on a screen time plan with your child to strike a balance with other activities.
 - When using screens:
 - Have regular conversations with your child to find out their online viewing habits and discuss potential online dangers such as inappropriate content, cyberbullying and interacting with strangers on the internet.
 - Use parental control settings to ensure your child access age-appropriate content.
 - You should not give your child unrestricted access to internet or social media services.



What are the potential effects of excessive screen use?

Excessive screen use in infants and young children is associated with the following:

Social

- Reduced parent-child interaction
- Displacement of positive activities such as outdoor activities, and play with other children
- Social communication difficulties

Development

- Speech and language delay especially in children under 2 years old
- Poorer learning outcomes

Physical Health

- Increased risk of obesity
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Poorer quality of sleep and shorter sleep duration
- Myopia, eye strain, dry eyes

Behaviour

- Reduced attention span
- Poorer impulse control
- Increased risk of challenging behaviours (e.g. tantrums)



What are some tips for promoting healthy screen use?

✔ Do's

- Maintain consistent limits on screen use.
- Ensure screen use is balanced with other beneficial activities.
- Designate certain places in the home to be screen-free, e.g. bedrooms.
- Engage in active, rather than passive screen use.
- Co-view and interact with your child during screen use.
- Choose age appropriate and educational content.

✘ Don'ts

- Leave screen(s) switched on when not in use.
- Use screen devices during mealtimes and one hour before bedtime.
- Use screen devices excessively in front of your children.
- Use screen devices in your child's bedroom.

What should I do if my child starts a tantrum after reducing screen use?

Tantrums may occur if your child is accustomed to screen use. Here are some tips:

- Keep your child engaged in other activities to reduce his/her desire for screen use.
- Distract your child by offering his/her favourite toy, book or activity.
- Change the environment by taking him/her for a walk or outdoor play to shift his/her focus.
- Try to stay calm and resist giving in to your child's requests. These behaviours are likely to reduce over time.



What are some alternatives to screen use?

- Reading with your child
- Playing age-appropriate games or toys together with your child
- Singing and dancing to music, songs, and nursery rhymes
- Arts and craft activities
- Cooking with your child
- Going to the playground, park, library, etc.

Ensure screen use does not replace other essential activities like physical play, face-to-face social interactions, and quality family time. The key is to harness the potential benefits of screen use while mitigating the potential negative effects through responsible and mindful management.

Talk to your child's doctor if you have concerns about your child's screen use.



Additional Resources on Screen Use

+ Local screen use guidance

<https://go.gov.sg/screenadvisory-infographic>

<https://www.healthhub.sg/programmes/183/parent-hub>

<https://www.moh.gov.sg/others/resources-and-statistics/guidance-on-screen-use>

+ Ideas on alternative activities to reduce screen time

<https://commercialfreechildhood.org/screen-free-even-school/>

+ Advice on suitability of media content

<https://www.common sense media.org/>

<https://www.imda.gov.sg/digitalforlife/Digitalwellness>

<https://www.digitalforlife.gov.sg/learn/resources>

Child Development Resources

Parenting and caring for a young child is rewarding but it can also be challenging at times. For more resources on child development such as screen use, sleep hygiene, and the management of challenging behaviours, visit <https://www.nuh.com.sg/cdu-resources>.



NUH Child Development Unit

NUH Child Development Unit is part of the Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children's Medical Institute at National University Hospital. The clinic provides multidisciplinary assessments, therapy and holistic management of children with developmental & behavioural disorders from birth to 7 years old.

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