Kids and Technology: When to Limit It and How

How to keep screen time in check for kids' health and development

By [Katherine Lee](#)

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It seems these days that kids are operating electronic devices such as smartphones at extremely young ages. Just take a look around any [local playgroup](#) or playground and you're likely to see kids as young as 2, or even younger, clutching playing games or watching videos on a phone or tablet.

When it comes to technology, kids are not only starting to use it at a younger age, they are also using it in more situations, both at home and at school. Today, technology for kids is a source of learning and entertainment. In a pinch, when parents have to get dinner made or take a few minutes to answer emails, it's also a convenient babysitter.

The Good and Bad of Tech

For school-age kids, technology can be a double-edged sword. There are countless benefits that can be garnered from using technology.

For instance, computers can be used to do research, play online math games, and improve [language skills](#) . Television can offer educational programs such as documentaries and other educational materials. Even video games can encourage developmental skills such as hand-eye coordination. Some motion-controlled, active games can also promote physical activity such as dancing.

However, all these electronic devices can have some distinct disadvantages as well. Here are some reasons why it's a good idea to limit your kids' screen time and how to do it with minimal fuss.

6 Reasons to Limit Kids' Screen Time

It may interfere with sleep. Getting enough sleep can be challenging enough for busy kids. They often have homework and after-school activities crammed into their weekdays and extracurricular activities and sports on weekends. Additionally, according to the [American](#)

[Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry,](#) kids average as much as three to four hours a day watching TV.

Add all that up and you have a recipe for sleep deprivation in kids. Moreover, electronic stimulation, such as that from watching TV or using the computer, has been shown to interfere with sleep (both falling asleep and staying asleep).

It may cut into family time or personal interaction. When we are using technology such as computers, games, and TV, we are not interacting with one another. Since finding good quality time can be difficult for many families, allowing technology to cut into those moments is something parents may want to prevent as much as possible.

While it can be fun to have a family movie night or play a video game together, the fact is that screen time means less face-to-face interaction time.

It may encourage short attention span. Studies have shown that too much screen time may be associated with attention problems.

[One study at Iowa State University](#) found this to be particularly true of children who already have difficulties paying attention or who tend to act impulsively. Video games were the primary focus of the study, though the researchers do state that any electronic media may have similar effects.

It may interfere with schoolwork. Children who watch a lot of TV are more likely to have lower grades and read fewer books. Further, research has shown that [cutting down kids' screen time](#) may improve kids' health and grades.

It may lead to less physical activity. More screen time has been associated with reduced [physical activity](#) and a higher risk of obesity in kids.

It may expose kids to too much advertising and inappropriate content. Many television shows and commercials depict sexuality and violence as well as stereotypes or drug and alcohol use. Many commercials also promote junk food and toys in powerful and alluring ways that are designed to get kids to want these items.

5 Ways to Limit Technology

Admittedly, it is easy to simply turn on the TV or let your kids play a video game when they complain about being bored. However, there are many options when it comes to finding alternative forms of entertainment. Letting kids use technology with limits can be achieved if you keep some of these key tips in mind.

- **Do not put a TV in your child's room.** Having a TV in the bedroom has been linked to a number of problems including lower test scores, sleeping problems, and obesity.

- **Turn it off.** When the kids are not watching a specific program, turn off the television. Keep it off during mealtimes and especially when they are studying or doing homework.

- **Help your child choose a video game or a show.** The best way to know what your child is watching or playing is by helping her pick out a show or a game. When picking

out a [new family movie](#) or game, read the reviews, watch previews, or ask other parents. Above all, know your child and trust your own instincts on what is appropriate.

- **Limit his screen time.** Whether it's one hour of TV and video games a day or a couple of hours a week, limit the amount of time your child spends with technology. More importantly, be committed and stick to those times you set.

- **Opt for alternatives to technology-based activities.** Find great ways to spend family time together without tech devices, such as by playing [board games](#) or reading [good books](#).

A Word From Verywell

Even though technology can provide us and our children with wonderful opportunities, it can also have negative effects on our health and well-being. While you encourage your children to unplug, keep in mind that you can set a good example for them. Try to limit your own screen time and do your best to create non-tech centered activities for the entire family.

Sources:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Facts for Families: Children and Watching TV. 2011.

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