

# CHILDREN AND TECHNOLOGY: SETTING APPROPRIATE LIMITS

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TV, interactive video games and the Internet can be excellent sources of education and entertainment for children. Too much screen time (time spent in front of computers, T.V.s, gaming consoles, media players, tablets and cell phones) can however lead to unhealthy side effects<sup>1</sup>. According to a 2014 report by Discovery Health, “South African children spend a large portion of their time in sedentary behaviour, the most concerning of which is screen time”<sup>2</sup>. Too much screen time has been linked to negative outcomes such as childhood obesity; irregular sleep patterns; social, emotional and attention difficulties; reduced academic performance; an increase in childhood aggression; less time for active, imaginative play as well as poor social skill development<sup>3</sup>.

The American Academy of Paediatrics discourages media use by children under the age of two and recommends that older children’s screen time be limited to a maximum of two hours, of quality programming, per day. It is also recommended that parents and caregivers ensure that children have access to a wide range of alternative free-time activities such as spending time outside, learning to cook or bake, reading books or magazines, playing board games, building puzzles, doing art work, playing sport and spending time with friends, as these activities will encourage children to develop into healthy, well-rounded individuals<sup>1</sup>. Surfing the internet, spending a large portion of time on social media websites (such as Facebook or Twitter), and watching Youtube videos are some examples of unhealthy screen time activities for children<sup>4</sup>. It is important for parents and caregivers to monitor screen time and to educate their children about the importance of engaging in more creative, social and physically active pastimes.

## **Simple Steps to Reduce Screen Time at Home Include:**

Setting a good example by limiting your own screen time, eliminating background T.V. (which will often attract children’s attention), keeping T.V.s and computers out of children’s bedrooms (as easy access is likely to result in more screen time), turning cell phones and T.V.s off during meal times as this encourages family members to spend more time actively engaging with one another, setting school day rules so that children do not spend all of their free time during the week watching T.V. or playing video games, and ensuring that allocated screen time is valuable, engaging viewing for your child<sup>3</sup>.

For a list of references and links to more information on this topic please visit <http://www.christinedarney.co.za/Psych-Ed/psych-ed.html>.

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