



Reducing Screen Time and Helping Children Move More

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Q: What is screen time and why is it a problem?

A: Screen time means time spent on television, movies, computers, games, and/or web-browsing. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that screen time for kids should be limited to one or two hours a day. Children who watch more than two hours of TV a day are more likely to be overweight and often suffer from irregular sleep patterns.

Q: I've noticed that one of the National HEPA Standards "does not permit access to television or movies." What does this mean? If our afterschool program occasionally shows short videos as part of our anti-bullying campaign, is that okay?

A: First, congratulations on working towards achieving the National HEPA Standards and for championing anti-bullying! Research shows that obese children are more likely to be bullied than their non-obese peers so your work plays a vital role. This HEPA standard encourages your out-of-school time site to prevent children from having the opportunity to access TV or movies *unless* it's intentional and meaningful for educational and enrichment purposes. For many children (and adults), limiting computer use and getting away from all screens can be a challenge. Because work- and homework-related screen times are sometimes essential, it is important to ensure that *any other* unnecessary screen time is limited.

Tip: You can always integrate physical activity when you utilize screen time for educational purposes.

Q: How can I ensure any unnecessary screen time is limited?

A: Here are a few strategies for reducing screen time and making it more active:

1. Set a good example. [Research](#) shows that most parents do not set rules for watching TV, playing video games or using the computer. Only 28% of 8- to 18-year-olds said their parents set TV-watching rules. The same research shows that when media rules are set, use is almost three hours lower per day. Homes may not have any media rules so out-of-school time sites provide an excellent opportunity outside the classroom to help children work towards physical activity goals while reducing screen time.
 - Tip: Checking social media sites in front of children sends a mixed message.

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2. If you utilize TV or movies for educational purposes, mark those on the calendar. Make sure children know why you're utilizing the TV and that it is to be turned on only for that specific purpose.
3. It's easy to default to using screen time as a reward, often in conjunction with unhealthy foods. Resources like [Rewards Kids will Crave](#) provides a list of fun and healthy rewards to use.
4. Remember when screen time was used as filler? Forget the days when a substitute teacher meant watching a movie! Find easy-to-use physical activity games and resources in the Alliance for a Healthier Generation Resource Database at healthiergeneration.org. Try the Playworks Playbook for active indoor games.
5. Bad weather got you stuck indoors? Rather than using the TV or big screen to entertain kids with shows or cartoons, get your kids moving and let them have fun. A great resource to try is [GoNoodle](#). You can race, jump, stretch, dance or even relieve stress with a few yoga poses.
6. Avoid having screens available during meals or snacks. Watching TV while eating makes it easier to continue sitting and watching TV after you've finished your meal. Instead, use snack and mealtime as an opportunity to build quality youth-adult relationships and to hear what's on children's minds. If possible, serve meals family-style. If there are screens in places where you eat, try to remove them.
7. Share screen time practices with families. Research shows that families who eat together tend to eat more nutritious meals. Encourage families to set screen time boundaries and to make eating together a priority--try having family meals at least two to three times a week! Send home physical activities such as [Activity Works – At Home](#).
8. Make screen time active. After a few minutes of screen time, hit pause and play "As If" from [AfterSchool Energizers](#).
9. Seeing snack foods, candy, soda and fast food on TV affects all of us, especially children. Help children understand that just because food is on TV, even if their favorite TV characters eat or drink it, doesn't mean it's good for you. Try the [empowerme4life](#) activity, *My Alternatives to Screen Time*, to start the conversation.

Find these and more resources at healthiergeneration.org.