

Why to Limit Your Child's Media Use

Today's children and teens are growing up immersed in digital media. They are exposed to media in all forms, including TV, computers, smartphones, and other screens.

Because media can influence how children and teens feel, learn, think, and behave, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages parents (and caregivers) to help their children form and practice healthy media use habits.

Facts About Digital Media Use:

- Almost 75% of teens own a smartphone. They can access the Internet, watch TV and videos, and download interactive applications (apps). Mobile apps allow photo-sharing, gaming, and video-chatting.
- 25% of teens describe themselves as "constantly connected" to the Internet.
- 76% of teens use at least one social media site. More than 70% of teens visit multiple social media sites, such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram.
- 4 of 5 households (families) own a device used to play video games (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/Video-Games-Set-Your-Own-Ratings-System.aspx>).



Why Limit Media Use?

Overuse of digital media and screens may place your child or teen at risk of

- **Obesity.** Excessive screen use, as well as having a TV in the bedroom, can increase the risk of obesity (</English/health-issues/conditions/obesity/Pages/Obesity-Prevention-AAP-Policy-Explained.aspx>). Teens who watch more than 5 hours of TV per day are 5 times more likely to be overweight than teens who watch 0 to 2 hours. Watching TV for more than 1.5 hours daily is a risk factor for obesity for children 4 through 9 years of age. This is in part due to the fact that viewers are exposed to advertising for high-calorie foods. Viewers are also more likely to snack or overeat while watching screen media.
- **Sleep problems.** Media use can interfere with sleep (</English/healthy-living/sleep/Pages/Healthy-Sleep-Habits-How-Many-Hours-Does-Your-Child-Need.aspx>). Children and teens who spend more time with social media or who sleep with mobile devices in their rooms are at greater risk for sleep problems. Exposure to light (particularly blue light) and stimulating content from screens can delay or disrupt sleep, and have a negative effect on school.
- **Problematic internet use.** Children who overuse online media can be at risk for problematic Internet use. Heavy video gamers are at risk for Internet gaming disorder. They spend most of their free time online, and show less interest in offline or "real-life" relationships. 4% to 8% of children and teens may have problems limiting their Internet use, and almost 10% of US youth 8 to 18 years of age may have Internet gaming disorder. There may be increased risks for depression at both the high and low ends of Internet use.
- **Negative effect on school performance.** Children and teens often use entertainment media at the same time that they're doing other things, such as homework (</English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/Developing-Good-Homework-Habits.aspx>). Such multi-tasking can have a negative effect on school.

- **Risky behaviors.** Teens displays on social media often show risky behaviors, such as substance use, sexual behaviors, self-injury, or eating disorders. Exposure of teens through media to alcohol, tobacco use, or sexual behaviors is associated with earlier initiation of these behaviors.
- **Sexting and privacy and predators.** Sexting (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/The-New-Problem-of-Sexting.aspx>) is sending nude or seminude images as well as sexually explicit text messages using a cell phone. About 12% of youth age 10 to 19 years of age have sent a sexual photo to someone else. Teens need to know that once content is shared with others they may not be able to delete or remove it completely. They may also not know about or choose not to use privacy settings. Another risk is that sex offenders may use social networking, chat rooms, e-mail, and online games to contact and exploit children.
- **Cyberbullying.** Children and teens online can be victims of cyberbullying (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/Cyberbullying.aspx>). Cyberbullying can lead to short- and long-term negative social, academic, and health issues for both the bully and the target. Fortunately, programs to help prevent bullying may reduce cyberbullying.

Tips for Healthy Media Use:

Children today are growing up in a time of highly personalized media use experiences, so parents must develop personalized media use plans for their children. Media plans should take into account each child's age, health, personality, and developmental stage. All children and teens need adequate sleep (8-12 hours, depending on age), physical activity (1 hour), and time away from media. **Parents can create a Family Media Use Plan online** (</English/media/Pages/default.aspx>).

Here are some guidelines for healthy media use.

- Find out what type of and how much media are used and what media behaviors are appropriate for each child—and for you. Place consistent limits on hours of media use as well as types of media used.
- Check your children's media use for their health and safety.
- Avoid exposure to devices or screens for 1 hour before bedtime. Do not let your children sleep with devices such as smartphones.
- Discourage entertainment media while doing homework.
- Plan media-free times together, such as family dinners (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/Mealtime-as-Family-Time.aspx>).
- Decide on media-free, unplugged locations in homes, such as bedrooms.
- Engage in family activities that promote wellbeing, such as sports, reading, and talking with each other.
- Set a good example and turn off the TV and put your smartphone on "do not disturb" during media-free times with your family.
- Use sites like Common Sense Media (<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>) to help you decide if movies, TV shows, apps, and videos games are age and content appropriate for your children and your family values.
- Share your family media rules with caregivers or grandparents to help ensure rules are consistent.
- Talk with your children and teens about online citizenship and safety. This includes treating others with respect online, avoiding cyberbullying and sexting, being wary of online solicitations, and safeguarding privacy.
- Encourage your child's school to teach digital citizenship
- Remember that your opinion counts—so make your voice heard. Let a TV station know if you like a program, or contact the makers of a video game if the content is too violent. Visit the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) (<http://reboot.fcc.gov/parents>) website for more information.
- Get other parents and your school and community involved to advocate for better media programs and for healthier habits. For example, encourage your school and community to sponsor a "Screen-Free Week" (<http://www.screenfree.org/>).

Additional Information from HealthyChildren.org:

- [How to Make a Family Media Use Plan \(/English/family-life/Media/Pages/How-to-Make-a-Family-Media-Use-Plan.aspx\)](#)
- [Where We Stand: TV Viewing Time \(https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwi6zPKtur_PAhVE5iYKHft1APwQFggrMAI&url=https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Where-We-Stand-TV-Viewing-Time.aspx&usg=AFQjCNGg2eeqTLA42f1vY-2U6Pmrqe2VWA&sig2=M2fTPy4uTKImOY110tXu0w&bvm=bv.134495766%2cd.eWE\)](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwi6zPKtur_PAhVE5iYKHft1APwQFggrMAI&url=https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Where-We-Stand-TV-Viewing-Time.aspx&usg=AFQjCNGg2eeqTLA42f1vY-2U6Pmrqe2VWA&sig2=M2fTPy4uTKImOY110tXu0w&bvm=bv.134495766%2cd.eWE)
- [Food and TV: Not a Healthy Mix \(/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Food-and-TV-Not-a-Healthy-Mix.aspx\)](#)
- [11 Ways to Encourage Your Child to Be Physically Active \(/English/healthy-living/fitness/Pages/Encouraging-Your-Child-to-be-Physically-Active.aspx\)](#)
- [Video Games: Establish Your Own Family's Rating System \(/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Video-Games-Set-Your-Own-Ratings-System.aspx\)](#)
- [Developing Good Homework Habits \(/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/Developing-Good-Homework-Habits.aspx\)](#)

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(<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx>)

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