



# Managing Screen Time



## How To Limit Screen Time in Your Family

Prepared by Dr. Kate Aubrey, Psychologist

One of the most common questions Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Kate Aubrey, gets from parents is how to manage children's screen time at home. Although guidelines for screen time have been developed, many parents find them outdated and unrealistic. While parents grapple with how much screen time is too much for children, new research now supports their suspicions: An excess amount of time in front of screens is bad for kids.

This guide is to help parents manage their children's time in front of screens.

### Screen Time Recommendations

The Canadian Pediatric Society encourages children from 2-16 years to spend less than 1 to 2 hours in front of a screen per day.

Given that research shows that Canadian children in Grades 6 to 12 are spending close to eight hours every day in front of screens, it's clear that few families are following this advice.

Parents often feel helpless when it comes to controlling their children's screen time. Did you know that screen time accounts for more arguments between parents and kids than almost any other topic?

**Screen-time recommendations**

- 0-2 years  
No screen-time
- 2-5 years  
1 hour/day
- >5 years  
1-2 hours/day




every chance to learn

Australian Government, Department of Health & Ageing; American Academy of Pediatrics

## How to Limit Screen Time

**Set the Example.** Do not expect your kids to limit screen time if you don't.

**Set Limits.** This one is very important. Setting a limit, even a small one, teaches your child basic regulation. This can include weekly screen-time limits, limits on the kinds of screens kids can use, and guidelines on the types of activities they can do or programs they can watch.

**Create rules together.** You'll be more likely to get your kid's buy-in if you come up with screen-time rules as a family. Together you can write up a contract that outlines clear house rules with rewards and agreed upon consequences.

**Phones off at bedtime.** Ask your child or teen to give you their phone, tablet, or iPod at a certain time at the end of the day so they aren't interrupted with phone calls or text messages during bedtime. Consider having a "charging station" in your bedroom or a common area where all electronics go at night, every night, including your own. Program the "do not disturb" function so that no messages or calls will disrupt bedtime or sleep.

**Give them choice.** Offer kids a set amount of screen time each day and let them decide how to use it.

**Encourage other activities.** Create a list of activities your kids can do when they are bored. Reading, doing puzzles or board games, playing outside, etc.

**Timing.** The timing of screen usage is as important as the time spent. Teens and children should not be allowed on their screen shortly before bedtime and **no form of connective device should be allowed in their bedrooms.**

**Set family viewing time.** Have regular family movie nights and use them as opportunities to watch together and discuss.

**Pay to play:** Encourage kids to earn screen time by balancing it with equal amounts of reading, chores, or physical activity.

**Rewards.** Set a base limit of screen time per day and provide your child with opportunities to earn more (e.g., chores, good behaviour). Screen time makes some of the best rewards.

**Be consistent.** Don't choose rules you won't stick to. Always set yourself and your kids up for success!

## Apps to Limit Screen Time

There are plenty of third party apps to help limit your child's screen time. Apps stop you from having to police your child's screen time. Here are some of the most highly rated apps for iOS & Android.



### Screen Time

- Remote device monitoring, daily time limit, blocks some apps, web history.

### OurPact

- Enforce "black out" times throughout the day when device usage is disabled.

### DinnerTime

- Pause activities remotely for up to 24 hours as well as set a clock for bedtime.

Prepared by Dr. Kate Aubrey from The Canadian Paediatric Society & "Six realistic ways to limit screen time" The Globe and Mail, Dr. J. Huber, February 24, 2016.