Wellbeing Newsletter

Top Tips on Managing Screen Time

This issue of the WAMHS newsletter focuses on **Managing Screen Time**.
Screen time often poses a challenge for parents and carers, and by this point in the pandemic it might feel impossible. You might be wondering how much screen time is too much? Does online learning count? What about if my child connects with friends through gaming? What if I'm too exhausted to fight about it? There is no right answer when it comes to managing screen time, but we hope you find some of the information in this newsletter helpful.

How Much is Too Much Screen Time?

Wellbeing is all about achieving balance and ensuring that we cover our **BACES**:

B is for body (exercise, healthy eating, relaxing)

A is for achievement (small achievements count!)

C is for connecting (friends, family, and community)

E is for enjoyment (make time for things you enjoy)

S is for stepping back and relaxing (e.g. mindfulness)

The pandemic has changed how we spend our time, so we might have to get creative in ensuring that our **BACES** are covered.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- *Is my child sleeping enough and getting a somewhat balanced diet?*
- *Are they getting some form of exercise everyday?*
- *Are they spending some quality time with family?*
- *Do they use some screen time to keep in touch with friends?*
- *Are they invested in school and keeping up with their homework?*
- *Do they have time to relax and do things they enjoy?*

If you answered yes to most of these questions, then it's probably not a huge deal if your child is spending a bit more time watching their favourite TV show these days. What is important is achieving a balance that helps your child to feel happy and healthy.

If your child is spending all their time alone gaming, then this could be a sign that they are feeling sad and withdrawn. If your child refuses to stop gaming to get daily exercise, connect with friends, or do other things they enjoy, then this is a sign that you need to intervene.

Helpful Ways to Use Screen Time

If your child is spending a bit more time on screen than usual at the moment, think about how to encourage them to use screen time in a positive way. It might be possible for them to use screen time to cover some of their **BACES.**

Connections and creativity

Virtual sleepovers, virtual pen pals or virtual scavenger hunts with friends.

Relaxation and exercise

Apps: SmilingMind; HeadSpace; Breath, Think, Do with Sesame; Three Good Things: A Happiness Journal.
GoNoodle: 100s of free movement and mindfulness videos and games that require movement to play.

Pursue hobbies and build skills

Write stories, create a recipe book, start a newspaper, design a mood board, try a new language.

The Child Mind Institute has a long list of creative and educational online resources that you can use to enhance your child's screen time routine.

Be Kind to Yourself (and Your Kids)!

Being a perfect parent or carer is an impossible task and it is especially difficult right now.

In these times, try to make decisions in the best interests of the whole family (including yourself). If allowing your child to watch another episode or play another game gives you time to exercise, work or relax, then that may be the best decision right now.

Remember, it is equally important for parents and caregivers to cover their **BACES** too!

It can be helpful to ask yourself - *Do I parent better when I feel emotionally well?* If the answer is yes, even more reason to prioritise self-care and self-kindness.

Every Child is Different

Each child is different so when it comes to limiting screen time, it is important to tune into what makes them feel happy and healthy.

If gaming improves their mood, leads to a happy household and provides opportunities for connecting with friends, learning skills or relaxation, then it is a positive addition to your child's weekly activities.

If you notice that gaming, screen time or social media are having a negative impact on your child's mood or sleep, then it is important to think about how to change their screen time routine.

Screen Time Tantrums

It is also important to consider short term vs. long term benefits when deciding on the right amount of screen time. For instance, allowing a child to play one more game because they threw a tantrum may help to maintain calm in that moment; however, it may also teach your child that throwing a tantrum is helpful. In other words, they might think "that worked, I should do it more often"!

Bedtime

Screen time before bed is linked to poor sleep for some children. If your child is struggling to get to sleep, then consider removing screens at least one hour before bed and involve them in creating a new bedtime routine that they will enjoy. You could use the following as a guide:

Shift- Shift activities take less than 10 minutes and end with getting into bed (e.g. having a light snack, brushing teeth, saying goodnight to pets).

Snuggle - Snuggle activities are what you do once you get into bed to help you settle down for the night. They should take about 15 minutes (e.g. read a book, listen to an audible or have a cuddle).

Snooze - The snooze activity is the thing that happens as you are finding your favourite position and closing your eyes. It might involve a goodnight kiss and a phrase that you repeat each night e.g. "goodnight, sleep tight".

Setting Limits on Screen Time

Be consistent with boundaries – if you set a limit, follow through regardless of pushbacks.

Start with compassion – if you're trying to change your child's screen time routine, they're likely to be upset at first. Encourage them to talk to you about this. Let them know that you understand why they're upset, but that you want to help them to find other things they can enjoy.

If your child loves screen time, consider extra screen time as a reward for good behaviour.

Create a menu of alternatives – together with your child create a list of fun activities they can do instead of screen time **.**

Maintain a routine including a screen time slot – it might not always seem like it, but children like boundaries, routines and knowing what to expect. These things are really important. Your child might find it helpful to have a visual timetable with screen time included.

Model healthy screen use – most of us are guilty of spending a bit too much time on social media or Netflix sometimes. Remember to be kind to yourself; however, it might be that you would also find it helpful to swap out some of the screen time for activities that help you to cover all your BACES.

Staying Safe Online – Top Tips

It's not always easy to know what's safe online and what's not; therefore, it is important to monitor what children get up to online. They may not be too happy about this at first, but you can explain that it is your job to keep them safe, so it has to be done – no negotiations!

Agree boundaries – be clear on what your child can and can't do online.

Explore together – ask them to show you what they're up to; this can be a great way to connect with your child and learn about their interests too.

Put yourself in control – install parental controls.

Stay involved – encourage them to use tech devices in communal areas.

Check age ratings – for example, the minimum age limit for many social networking sites (including Facebook) is 13.

Search safely – research child friendly search engines and add these to your 'Favourites'. Safe search settings can also be activated on Google and YouTube.