

Screen Time - Advice for Parents

Lockdown has heightened our concern about the amount of time our children are spending on digital devices (screen time). The Royal College of Psychiatrists published a report in January 2020 on the impacts of screen time on young people. Research into this area is currently deemed limited and more is required. However, they do recommend a precautionary approach.

There is also a reminder that ‘screen use’ is as important as ‘screen time’. If screen time consists of a large amount of negative content and exposure to the 4 Cs (outlined in the section ‘What is Online Safety?’) then risk of harm can be increased and increased still further if a child is more vulnerable in any way, for example if a child has a pre-existing mental health condition.

Conversation, balance and ensuring other activities are available are good parts of a strategy. The value of a digital sunset and ensuring good sleep, food and exercise should also be remembered.

Please find below some information and advice to help parents support their children at home. Please also refer back to other sources of information made available in this Online Safety section of the Parents’ area of the Marlborough College website.

The following websites provide some excellent ideas and practical tips to help manage screen time and by looking through the pages, age specific ideas can also be found.

<https://www.internetmatters.org/issues/screen-time/>

<https://www.internetmatters.org/resources/guide-to-managing-children-screen-time/>

<https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/digital-wellbeing>

A quick summary of advice for parents can also be seen here:

Table 4 – A quick guide for parents	
Under 1 year old	Avoid screen time
2-5 years old	Ensure that screen time is part of a varied and balanced day with activity and face-to-face time. Spend at least three hours a day in physical activity. Children should spend no more than one hour sitting watching or playing with screens.
5-11 years old	Develop a plan with your child for screen time and try to stick to it. Ensure that children have a balance of activities in the day with physical activity, face-to-face conversation and tech-free times. Encourage mealtimes to be tech free. Ensure that you have spoken to your children about how to keep safe online and check that they are keeping safe. Make it clear that you will support them if they feel unsafe or upset online. Try to ensure that there are no screens in the bedroom at night.
11-16 years old	Develop a plan with your teenager; if you have a plan, check that this still fits. Encourage a balance of activity, face-to-face social time, schoolwork and family time. Encourage mealtimes to be tech free. Keep having conversations about keeping safe online and offer space to talk about things that teens might see online which they find upsetting. Make it clear that you will support them if they feel unsafe or upset online. Try to ensure that there are no screens in the bedroom at night.

(Source: Technology Use and the Mental Health of Children and young People, CR225. The Royal College of Psychiatrists, January 2020, page 47.)