

Balancing screen time

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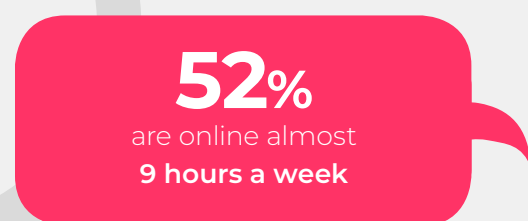
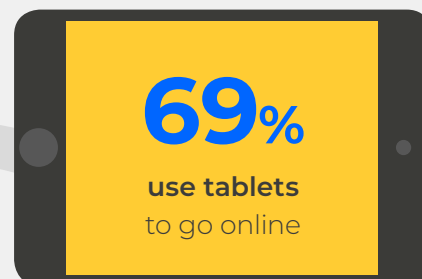
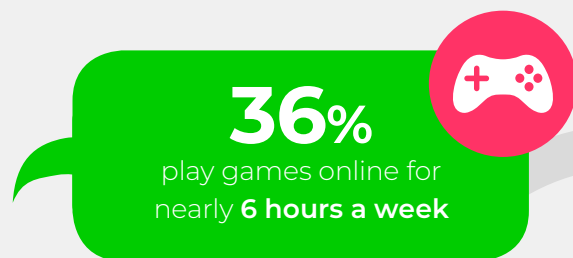
Top tips to support children in Early Years (0-5)

A balance use of screens can offer children key benefits to help them to learn, explore and interact with the world around them.

Get simple tips to put balance and purpose behind screen time to help young children benefit from their screen use.



How are children using screens?



Source: [Ofcom Children and Parents Media use and attitudes report 2018](#)



What parents tell us

Screens' impact on physical wellbeing

Over a third of parents are worried children are not getting enough time to play outside because of screen time.

Screens are good for creativity

Nearly 7 out of 10 parents believe that using devices gives children another way of being creative for example a child who enjoys dancing, sharing a new routine online with family and friends.

What are the benefits and challenges of screen use?



Screen time benefits

- Screen use provides a range of opportunities for creativity and learning – **70% of parents strongly agree that using devices is essential for their child's development.**

Source: *Internet Matters Look both ways report.*

- Screens can be a great tool to **allow children to maintain relationships** with family and friends.
- **Screens can help ease the financial burden** when looking to entertain children.

Screen time challenges

- Young children might **stumble across inappropriate content** that may have a negative impact on their digital wellbeing.
- Long periods of passive screen time **could have a physical effect on their development** (i.e. eyes, brain), sleep cycle and behaviour.
- Younger children **may not understand the concept of what the internet** is and how it works so could find it hard to differentiate between what is real and what is fake.

5 top tips to balance screen time



1 Set rules on the use of screens in and out of the home

Create a **family agreement** together to manage expectations of how screens and online platforms should be used and why.

Set rules to meet the needs of each child based on their use, interest and engagement of screens and **consider how screen time can complement** what they do offline.

Make sure to stick to the rules and model the behaviour you'd like to follow to make it a success. It's a good idea to review the rules as children grow and become more active online.

For younger children, it's important to **prioritise face-to-face interactions and apps that encourage active play**

to support their development of language and other skills.

2 Make family time and sleep a priority over screens

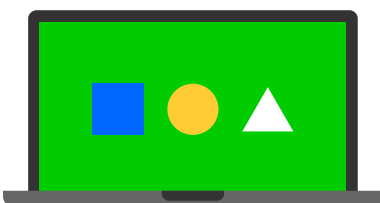
By creating **device free zones at meal times** and around the home and making use of tools to set limits on when screens can be used, you can improve family interactions and reduce interruptions to children's bedtime routine.

Experts recommend switching off screens **at least an hour before bedtime** to give young children time to wind down.

3 Play, watch and discover together

As young children take their first digital footsteps, **play, watch and discover together to stay engaged in** what they are doing and create spaces to talk about what they enjoy and how to stay safe.

This will help them feel more confident to come to you if they get stuck or see something that makes them feel uncomfortable. It's also important to **stay calm and not overreact** when children tell you what has gone wrong.



4 Take the lead when choosing what they see and do on screens

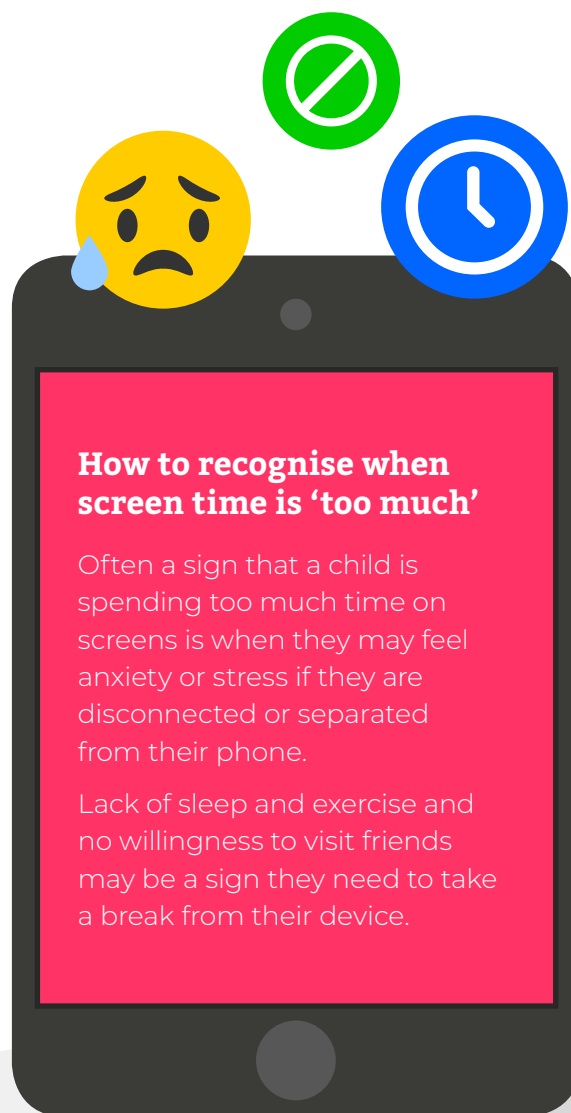
Together find age-appropriate apps, websites and games that will give your child a way to explore their passions, enhance their skills while building their confidence in navigating the online world.

Be sure to make use of free tech tools on the apps and devices they use to create a safer space for them to explore online.

Tools like Apple's Screen time and Google's Digital Wellbeing dashboard can **give you an overview of what they are spending their time on** which you can use as a starting point to talk about ways to improve their screen use and protect their digital wellbeing.

5 Set a good example with your own screen use

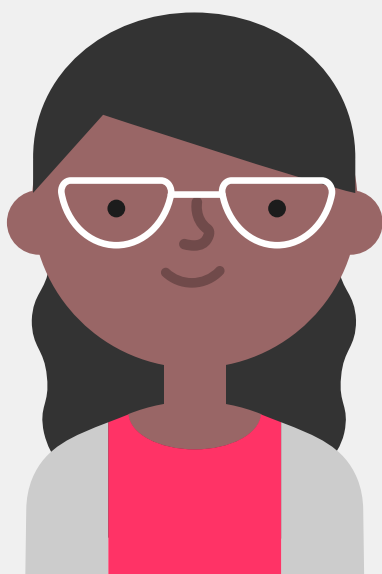
Children will tend to model their behaviour on you, so if you **encourage them to take breaks** when on screen or leave devices out of the bedroom at night, they will follow your lead.



How to recognise when screen time is 'too much'

Often a sign that a child is spending too much time on screens is when they may feel anxiety or stress if they are disconnected or separated from their phone.

Lack of sleep and exercise and no willingness to visit friends may be a sign they need to take a break from their device.



The truth about screen time

Not all screen time is created equal so it's important to encourage children to have a healthy balance between passive screen time (i.e watching YouTube) and interactive screen time (i.e. creating content or playing games online).

There is no safe level of screen time but it doesn't mean that all screen time is harmful. Lack of evidence has meant that experts have found it hard to recommend a cut-off for children screen time overall.

One size does not fit all when it comes to screen time – it's more about getting it right for your families needs.

Visit internetmatters.org/screentime for more advice

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