

Children and technology

1) **Activity:** Share with another parent what you like about the way you are managing your child's use of technology devices and what you would like to be different

2) **Before implementing rules about technology, identify:**

- Your values related to technology
- Values other caregivers' involved in your child's care have related to technology (school included!)
- Have an open discussion with other caregivers about these values

3) **Technology guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics**

- No screen time for children younger than 18mo with the exception of video-conferencing to connect toddlers to far-away family and friends (caregivers' supervision advised)
- For children 2 to 5 up to one hour of screen time per day
- For children 5-18 up to two hours of screen time per day
- For all: no screen during meals and no screen one hour before going to bed

4) **Is all technology bad?**

- Educational apps such as the ones from Sesame Workshops or Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) have shown efficacy in teaching literacy skills to preschoolers. Parents' interactions during technology use makes these apps much more effective
- Video-calls help children develop/maintain emotional bonds with distant relative and friends or feel connected to caregivers if they happen to be away
- For older children, traditional and interactive media can offer exposure to new ideas, promote civic engagement and offer a community of support for individuals and families struggling with specific challenges. Further, interactive media can promote healthy behaviors and in some cases offer life-saving resources (such as the hotline text messages that teens can use when they feel suicidal)
- Streaming TV (such as Netflix) offers quality shows and documentaries and limited exposures to commercials and ads

5) **Risks related to technology use:**

- Obesity risk due to excessive sedentary life style
- Sleep difficulties, particularly related to using technology before going to bed and keeping technology devices in the bedroom
- Exposure to inappropriate content
- Cyberbullying
- Sexting

- Higher cognitive and self-regulation skills are developed during real life interactions. Excessive use of technology prevent children from experiencing these interactions and practice attention and focus skills

6) Strategies to protect children from the risks related to technology use:

- Set clear limits/rules around time spent watching screen (be realistic and strategic!)
- Designate technology free times during the day (such as meals) and technology free areas of the house (such as bedrooms)
- Have your child use technology devices in common areas of the house, so that you can supervise what they are watching
- Use children's (relatively) safe applications, such as youtube kids
- Unless they are watching educational materials, prefer TV over youtube
- Talk with your children about the effects of sending messages and sharing information on the internet (children are not aware of the dangers of sharing information, neither of the long-term consequences of their actions on the internet)

7) Strategies to set and maintain limits around technology use

- Remember that you are in charge. Just like you oversee your child's nutrition or academic progress to make sure they are eating healthy food and learning at their potential, in the same way you are in charge of overseeing which technology materials your child is viewing
- Explain to your children that screens are like "candies for the brain" and although they may be fun, there is only so much that you can brain can have if we want the brain to grow well
- Use a timer to determine the end of screen time and/or pick technology activities which can be split in parts (such as episodes of a show or levels in a game)
- Have your child transition from screen watching to another relatively pleasurable activity
- Do not leave screens readily available in the house
- Be the good example! Avoid as much as possible engaging in screen time in front of your child and if you have to do it explain why you are using a screen (for instance explain: I am paying some bills)
- Set specific rules about when to use which type of screen. For example, only TV during the week and IPAD over weekends
- Have screen free play dates. This way play dates will allow your child to develop their imagination and social skills. If the guest child comes with a technology device, put it aside and say that this is your house rule (you can share this rule with the child's caregivers beforehand)
- Handle exception to technology rules as...exceptions! It may happen that you are in a situation when you have to let your child engage in more screen time than usual (such as you or child is sick, you have to work from home etc.) but remind

your child that scenario is an exception and revert back to the usual rules once things calm down

8) Other considerations:

- Avoid using technology devices as a digital pacifier: be sensitive to your child physical and emotional needs and think in advance about situations when your child will need to be entertained
- Consider that rules and limits will need to be revisited at each new developmental stage your child is going through

Parents' resources:

- 1) <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/138/5/e20162591.full.pdf> (guidelines about technology use)
- 2) <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162592> (guidelines about technology use)
- 3) http://files.ctia.org/pdf/bsw/example_of_family_rules.pdf (example of family “contract” about phone use)
- 4) “Calmer, Easier, Happier Screen Time” by N. Janis Norton
- 5) <https://teenhealthandwellness.com/static/hotlines#Suicide> (on line resources for teens)
- 6) https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/on-parenting/what-rules-should-parents-put-in-place-when-they-allow-children-to-have-tech-devices/2019/01/15/541f0052-14f9-11e9-803c-4ef28312c8b9_story.html?utm_term=.a4ce38cf5fb3
- 7) https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/02/15/german-government-adviser-recommends-ban-smartphones-children-younger-than/?utm_term=.3be0ab058428