

Hand-out for Parents

MANAGING "SCREEN TIME"

THIRTY YEARS AGO, experts were concerned about the amount of television children were watching. These days, the concern is not just television, but all "screen time," which includes video games, tablets, computers, cell phones and other devices. A recent survey shows that Canadian preteens average six to seven hours of screen time a day. That does not leave much time for other things that growing children need to do, like playing outdoors, reading books and interacting with people face-to-face.



Reducing children's screen time is a challenge, but it pays off. Less screen time is linked to better behaviour, better school achievement, more physical activity and less risk of being overweight. Consider whether any of these strategies will work for your family:

- **Set restrictions** on your children's screen time. Even if you can't meet the two hours a day some experts recommend, research shows that children whose parents set some limits have less screen time than children whose parents set no limits.
- **Have screenless meals.** Kids (and adults) don't really need to be answering texts, checking Facebook or watching TV at the dinner table. Why not make mealtime family time?
- **Set a good example.** Don't text or watch TV during meals or while you are playing with your kids.
- **Take TV out of the bedroom.** Children who have TVs in their bedrooms log more time on TV and video games.
- **Put cell phones away at night.** When preteens and teens take their cell phones to bed, they get less sleep as a result. Make it your family policy to park (or charge) cell phones at night.

- **Offer fun alternatives** to screen time. Children enjoy physical activity and playing with friends. But sometimes they need adult help to think of fun things to do or to make them possible.

- **Trade it.** Consider having children earn screen time by doing more desirable activities, such as playing outside, playing with friends, reading, or exercising.

Many parents share experts' concern about the type of material children today are exposed to. Young children don't have the ability to understand and process the violent, frightening or sexualized content of some television programs, videos and films.

- **Make it clear to your children** what types of media content are not acceptable. Make use of parental controls if necessary. This will reduce your child's exposure to inappropriate content.
- **Watch with your children.** Talking to children about troubling media content can reduce its negative impact.

REMEMBER that children needs lots of face-to-face interaction in order to develop social skills, emotional skills and thinking skills. Screens should not take priority over face-to-face activities.