

Managing Screen Time in the Family Home



Screen time is an enjoyable activity for many teenagers, but those who spend extended periods sitting using technology are likely to have poorer physical, social and academic outcomes. The Australian National Physical Activity and Sedentary guidelines suggests that children and teenagers should be limited to two hours of screen time a day. However, recent statistics show that 12 to 13-year olds are currently spending more than three hours a day on screens, with this number increasing as children age.

There are many benefits from using technology, including greater opportunities to learn, staying connected with peers and developing important technological skills. However, prolonged use of screen time, such as being on a phone, computer, iPad or TV, can lead to poorer mental health in children and teens.

When thinking about your teenager's online use, think about their reason for being online. Are they online for:

Connection: In today's world, many of our teenagers are using online platforms to connect with those around them. Using social media to safely connect with family and friends is healthy and should be encouraged for those teenagers who find chatting to people in person or over the phone difficult or confronting.

Creation: There are so many online platforms that are now available for teenagers to use to develop their creative skills. This can include making/listening to music, creating something artistic, writing, coding, playing a game that uses problem solving skills and development of buildings/programs etc. This is a healthy way to use online platforms in a way that allows your teens a space to develop their creative skills.

Consumption: Consumption is where our teenagers use online platforms to consume information that isn't necessarily helpful. This can look like mindlessly 'scrolling through Instagram feeds' or

watching multiple Youtube videos. Consuming information online is the part of online use that needs to be monitored and controlled, as too much technology time this way can encourage teenagers to become addicted to their screens without a worthwhile purpose.

If you're worried that your teenager may be online consuming information too often, signs to look out for include:

- General health and wellbeing neglect, such as a lack of hygiene.
- Sleep and appetite may be compromised or skipped.
- Becoming isolated or withdrawn for long periods of time.
- Appearing irritable when away from technology.
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, eye strain or excessive tiredness.
- A decline in academic performance or failing to complete homework.

If you think your teen is spending too much time consuming information online, there are a few strategies that can be implemented within the family home.

Explore FAMILY ZONE. Family Zone lets kids be kids – and empowers parents to be parents. Family Zones works by allowing parents to control any device that is connected to the home WiFi. You can create settings that work for your family such as limiting social media or blocking websites, while still allowing for unfiltered WiFi access for adults. For more information about keeping your children safe and responsible online, visit <https://www.familyzone.com/anz/families>

Set Technology Free Times. Choose a time for the whole family to put down their phone, TV and computer. This could be at the dinner table or an hour before bedtime. Together as a family come up with an alternate activity to replace tech time. This could be going for a walk together or playing a board game together. This tech free time gives a chance for your family to spend quality time together.

Technology Free Bedroom. Consider having a technology free bedroom, or having a technology curfew, so that all electronic devices are removed from rooms. This provides teenagers with an opportunity to wind down from the day, allowing for a better night's rest. Set up all the chargers in a communal space in the house such as the kitchen and work towards having the whole family put their phones away for the night at the same time.

Encourage other Activities. Encourage teenagers to become involved in activities that don't require a screen, such as going for a walk, taking the dog for a walk, playing a board game or finding a new hobby such as basketball, footy or rugby.

Model Healthy Technology Use. Teenagers often model the behaviour of technology use they see in the family home. Setting up rules and expectations, as well as modelling healthy technology use, will help to develop good practices in teenagers. This strategy is especially important as it applies to all strategies listed above. As parents and carers, partaking in the above strategies will show your teenagers that tech-free time can be done and that you are also invested in managing your own screen time.

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Further Reading

<https://aifs.gov.au/publications/childrens-screen-time#:~:text=A%20majority%20of%20Australian%20children,screen%20time%20per%20week%2Dda>

<https://austparents.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/screentime.pdf>

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