

# Supporting your Child's Mental Wellness: Screen Use for Youth aged 13-17



This is an emerging area of research. However, we know that there are both benefits and risks of screen use.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Canadian Pediatric Society, 2019)

## Potential benefits include:

- ✓ Combatting isolation, learning opportunities, self-expression, and civic engagement<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Social connections, particularly for minority youth populations (e.g. LGBTQIA2S+ community)<sup>2</sup>

## How much screen time is too much?

The Canadian 24 hour movement guidelines recommend that youth spend **less than 2 hours per day on recreational screen time**

(not including time spent on school-work)

However, **quality matters as much as quantity**, and **every child is unique** and **will experience the benefits and risks** of screen use differently.

## Risks to mental/physical health, including:

- ✓ Social comparison, displacement of other activities, interference with attention and learning<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Sleep disruption, overuse and problematic use, impacts to vision health, and sexual exploitation and abuse<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>(National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2023)



Parents and guardians are encouraged to create **personalized family media plans** to address their child's needs. Setting limits when children are young is easier than cutting back when they're older.

# Follow the 4 C's for some evidence-based tips to manage your child's screen use<sup>1,3</sup>:

<sup>3</sup>(American Association of Pediatrics, 2024)

## 1) Communicate - Have regular, open conversations with your child about their tech use.

- **Be open and curious** when talking to your child about tech use. Listen to what they have to say and ask questions like “I know that \_\_\_\_ [app/game] is important to you. I wanted to check in about it; how do you think things are going with your \_\_\_\_ [app/game] use?”
- If your child is using social media, talk about how inappropriate content might be recommended to them or appear in their feeds. Help them recognize false or mean videos, or idealized body images. **Let your child know that they can talk to you** about anything negative or inappropriate they see or experience online.
- Listen and provide support when kids are distressed due to small social missteps. **Have check-ins with your child about how they are feeling navigating their peer relationships online and offline.** Do they feel safe? Supported?

## 2) Content - When using screens, prioritize activities that are educational, active, or social over those that are passive or unsocial.

- **Read reviews**, such as those on [Common Sense Media](#) or [Plugged-In](#), to find out what shows, games, and movies are the right fit for their maturity level. In this age range, you may want to ask your child to be part of this process.
- **Watch shows and movies together.** These can be great conversation starters for topics like substance use, body image, romantic relationships, or other challenging topics.



[Plugged-In](#)



## 3) Calm - Consider: How does your child calm down emotions or go to sleep?

- Because devices and video games are an easy distraction, many teens say they use them to escape negative feelings. Support your child in exploring **other healthy coping strategies** (like talking to trusted friends/family, mind-body exercises, deep breathing, taking a walk, creating art or music, playing with pets).
- **Support your child in putting devices away at least 1 hour before bedtime** to help them relax and go to sleep.

## 4) Crowding Out - Instead of just focusing on 'reducing screen time' think about what your family might like to 'add back in.'

- **Ask your child: what does media get in the way of?**
- Talk with your kids about balancing time on screens so that there is enough time to sleep, read, draw, do homework, etc. Parents can role model putting phones down at bedtime, dinnertime, during homework, or on car rides- whatever makes sense for your family's media plan.

### Help teach your child strategies to manage their phone use

Turn off notifications and set time limits for certain applications

Rearrange home screen to have apps on pages 2 or 3, or consider deleting apps from your phone altogether

Use phone in greyscale mode during the evenings

Make a family rule to charge your phones outside of bedrooms at night

Talk with your child about some of the strategies app companies use to keep people on their devices for longer

Be aware of problematic media use, which occurs when media use is compulsive, interferes with friendships, or leads to frequent arguments

As part of your family's media plan, consider using [parental controls](#) with the ultimate goal of having your child begin to manage their own limits as they grow older.

Screen time can impact your child's vision health. Encourage them to blink regularly, keep screens an arm's length away from their face, and take regular breaks to go outside.