SCHOOL-AGE SCREEN TIME: TIPS FOR BALANCE

Screen time for school children: part of a balanced and healthy lifestyle

Screen time can be **part of a healthy lifestyle for children when it's balanced** with other activities that are good for your child's development, like physical play, reading and socialising. Getting the right balance also includes making sure screen time doesn't interfere with sleep.

Our tips can help you encourage your child to use screens in a balanced and healthy way.

1. Make rules about screen use

You can help your child find the balance between screen use and other activities by working with your child on some <u>family rules</u> or a family media plan.

Your family's rules might cover:
- **where** your child can use screens – for example, only in family rooms or not in the car

- **when** your child can use screens – for example, mealtimes are free of television, computers and phones, or no screen time before school or until chores are finished
- **how** your child can use screens – for example, for making animations or checking a netball shooting technique, but not for playing Candy Crush
- **how** you handle screen time for children of different ages – for example, there might be some games that your older child can play only when their younger sibling is out or has gone to bed.

It's okay if your rules include time limits to help your child balance screen time with other things like physical activity. For example, it might help to know that Singapore's physical activity guidelines say school-age children should have at least one hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day, like running and jumping.

2. Aim for short screen time sessions

Getting up and moving around is important for your child's energy levels, development, sleep, and overall health and wellbeing. If your child is having screen time, it's a good idea to encourage your child to take a break at least every 30 minutes and use screens in short bursts.

You can do this by encouraging your child to:
- use a timer to set breaks
- do something active when the timer ends, like play outside
- make use of natural breaks in screen time – for example, encourage your child to do a victory dance when they finish a level in a game.

3. Get your child moving, especially outside

It's a good idea to encourage your child to play outside several times a day.

Outdoor play doesn't have to be a big deal. For example, at this age, children enjoy:
- building and creating with equipment, furniture or other things they find outside
- chasing game or catching
- hide and seek

Active play and physical activity for school-age children can happen indoors as well as outdoors. It can be simple things like dancing, doing star jumps, or throwing and catching balls.

4. Imagine and create

Creative play like telling stories, playing word games, dressing up or drawing is good for your child's creative development. It helps your child learn how to experiment, think, learn and solve problems.

You can get ideas for creative play in these articles:
- Imagining, creating and play: school-age children
- School-age creative learning and development: ideas and activities.

Reading and storytelling with your child promotes brain development and imagination, teaches your child about language and emotions, and strengthens your relationship.

5. Encourage play and friendship with others

When children play face to face with others rather than by themselves on a screen, they develop **important life skills**. These include getting along with other people, being independent and learning how to sort out conflicts and problems.

You can support your school-age child's friendships by **arranging playdates and sleepovers**.

6. Avoid screen time before bed

School-age children need 9-11 hours sleep a night.

Using screens before bed can affect how quickly your child falls asleep. If your child avoids mobile phones, tablets, computer screens or TV in the hour before bed, your child is likely to get to sleep more quickly.

7. Keep screens out of bedrooms at night

If you keep mobile phones and other devices out of your child's bedroom at night, your child won't be able to stay up late playing games or messaging friends. This can also stop your child being disturbed in the night by messages or notifications.