Screen Time During COVID-19: Recommendations and Strategies

Many kids across the country are attending school online in order to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Because of this, the amount of time we are all spending in front of a screen is so much greater than it used to be!

What Screen Use During COVID-19 Means

- Due to online schooling needs, kids are now spending a large chunk of their day looking at a screen.
- It is important for kids to attend school online, but it is also important to think about how much screen time is used outside of school.
- However, you can use screen time as a <u>positive</u> thing:
  - Connect with friends & family you can't see in person
  - Play games together, or share **memes** or **photos**

Problems With Too Much Screen Time

- Too much screen time is not good for the growing brain, because kids need to be able to play and interact with their environment.
  - <u>Watching a screen does not activate the brain as well</u>
  - Kids who watch a lot of TV can have worse language and thinking skills
- Screen time before bed also makes it difficult to fall asleep.
- Too much screen time can worsen obesity.
  - Kids can also have problems with anger, self-control, and self-esteem.

How to Make the Most Out of Screen Time For Your Kids In School

- Screen time outside of school should be no more than about 1-2 hours.
- Kids should get at least 1 hour of exercise or physical activity every day
- Other things kids can do: reading, storytelling, singing, arts & crafts, playing with toys or puzzles

For Kids Too Young To Be In School

- <u>As little screen time as possible</u> recommended
- Any screen time should be watched **together**
  - Little kids learn words from screen time when you say it **with** them
- Screen time should be high quality
  - <mark><18 months</mark>: video chat only, babies this age don't learn from screen media.
  - <mark>18 to 24 months</mark>: educational content **together** with your child
    - No more than 30 minutes per day
  - <mark>2-5 years old</mark>: educational content you use **together** with your child like Sesame Street
    - No more than 1 hour per day

For Kids In School

- Make certain areas of the house or times of the day free from screens
- Encourage leisure time outside of the bedroom when they are not participating in school
- Use a technology use agreement to motivate
  - Allow them screen time if they hit certain learning goals
    - *Praise good behaviors with positive reinforcement*
- Your kid's phone may be their only connection with their friends
  - Check in with them to see how they are doing, especially when they don't have their phone

For Parents Who Use Screens

We know it can be tough raising your kids when you or they are at home all day and there is nowhere else to go. Don't forget that your kids look after you as well! The more screen time you use, the more your kid will want to use theirs. Consider putting your phone or tablet down to be a good role model, and take the chance to connect with your kids.

Bora Buyuktimkin, MD | Harbor-UCLA Pediatrics