



How to Know If Your Child's Screen-Time Is Unhealthy

Following are some signs that your child may have formed some unhealthy technology habits. It's important to note that if you are in any way concerned about your child's screen-time habits seek the help of a medical professional for a formal diagnosis.

Parents should be concerned if two or more of these behaviours are observed in their child over a period of time. Does your child:

- o **Spend vast amounts of time engaged with technology?** There's no specific number of hours that's safe or healthy for young children to use technology, but if it feels excessive to you then it's probably too much. Digital devices shouldn't dominate their *entire* leisure time. They should have other off-screen interests too.
- o **Have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep at night because of their screen use?** Is their onset of sleep delayed because of screen-use? Do their alerts and notifications wake them up in the night? Do they wake up early to use their device? Do they display signs of tiredness and irritability because of inadequate sleep due to overuse of technology? Poor sleep habits are a key sign of poor technology habits.
- o **Always become irritable, aggressive or moody after they've used a device?** This is often considered a 'typical' response because of the neurobiological changes that occur when children used screens (their nervous system is often overloaded after using a screen). However, if it's coupled with some other indicators listed here in this checklist it *may*



signal that your child's screen-time is unhealthy. Or, if their irritability, aggression or moodiness is prolonged over a period of time, or becomes worse over time, this may also be a sign that you don't have the balance right. We need to teach our kids that screen-time is a privilege and not a right- technology is a tool not a toy!

- o Find it hard to entertain themselves *without* a digital device? If your child cannot sit anywhere and be idle without using a gadget of some description, then this *may* indicate that they have an unhealthy relationship with technology.
- o Have poor self-regulation skills? Does your child always want to use a digital device when they're bored or idle? Do they get agitated and upset when you say they can't use a device?
- o Withdraw from social situations in preference to using digital devices? Can our child sustain friendships away from screens? Do screens dominate their play activities? Do they know how to have fun off a screen?
- o Withdraw from or no longer enjoys traditional activities that they previously enjoyed to pursue activities only on digital devices? Has there been a sudden change in a child's leisure pursuits? (This one is tricky because it's a natural part of child development to change and alter.)
- o Become restless, moody, depressed or irritable when attempting to reduce or stop technology activities?
- o Continue to use digital devices even when they're aware of the adverse effects their unhealthy screen-time is having on them? This can sometimes signal 'addictive' behaviours, particularly in children aged over 8 years who typically have developed self-regulation skills.



- o Lie or attempt to conceal the extent of their technology use to you, teachers or therapists? Do they wake up in the middle of the night to play a game, or are they hiding devices in bedrooms?
- o Needs to use technology for increased amounts of time in order to achieve the same level of satisfaction?
- o Use technology as a way of coping with or avoiding psychological problems?
- o Refuse to go to school or other regular activities such as sporting clubs or leisure activities because of a preference for using screens?
- o Become disinterested in their school work? Do teachers notice a decline in their school performance?
- o Display poor posture or complain of a sore body because of overuse of screens? Are they rubbing their eyes, or complaining of sore eyes, or body aches?

