

12th December 2016

Dear Parent/Guardian

We have been asked by parents to provide recommendations on the use of laptops, tablets, mobile phones and the internet at home. We have based our guidance on research by Dr Aric Sigman entitled "Managing Screen Time and Screen Dependency", a summary of which can be downloaded on Firefly.

Reduce exposure to Screens

Research indicates that there should be a maximum of two hours per day leisure screen time for children aged over 3 - this does not include homework.

Check access and availability

The very best advice is that you don't allow TVs, computers or any screen-based device into a child's bedroom. Dr Aric Sigman relates that he has spoken to many parents who have regretted allowing screens into bedrooms and feel removing them later is harder than refusing them in the first place. Even though it may be difficult, you should take the screens away from the bedroom, otherwise you risk your child's cognitive and physical health.

No screens before bedtime

Take a gap between screen time and sleep. Most screens these days use LCDs that emit a blue light that inhibits sleep and disrupts the circadian rhythm (body clock). Remember that the bedroom is not an entertainment centre. It's the place children go to sleep.

Explain the reasons

Don't just switch off the TV, tablet or computer – explain to your child why you are limiting screen time. Discuss the health benefits of reduced screen time. Children will listen to the health reasons for reduced screen time if the dangers are clearly pointed out.

Monitor use

Take an average week and look at how much screen time your child, and indeed the whole family, is subjecting themselves to. Add up the favourite TV shows, smartphone and tablet app play, internet browsing and video games, and that two hours is filled up very quickly.

Take breaks

Screen time often leads to over stimulation so take breaks to calm down a child's brain.

Using social media

Most social media sites (such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube) have set 13 years of age as their cut-off point because of a US law called Coppa (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act), which dates back to 1998. However, none of the most popular sites ask a user to verify their age in any meaningful way. Likewise, very few of the main social media sites are monitored for inappropriate language or content, although they do give the opportunity to report content.

Putting Content Online

According to research from Google, every two days now we create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilization up until 2003 (5 exabytes if you are interested!). If we think about how much information (text and photos) we put online, it is staggering. As well as monitoring what children put online about themselves it is worth considering the information about our children that we as parents make available to the world. An assumption that once you click "send" or

“post” that everyone in the world will have access to the information for all time is a good place to start.

Emails and Comments

As with other content, comments, texts and emails are easily sent, but difficult to take back. We should discuss with children how unkind or badly chosen words can hurt others, even unintentionally. Delicate conversations with friends are better face to face to avoid confusion.

Passwords and access to a child’s devices.

It is important that there is discussion between parents and their children about supervision. Parents should know the password to all of their child’s devices and children should understand that you wish to know what they are doing to keep them safe. You may also be pleasantly surprised at your children’s skills and creativity! Having children’s computers in a shared space in your home is the best way to ensure that they are safe online. Monitoring software can range from over-zealous to ineffective and needs regular intervention. Children can be surprisingly adept at circumventing such software anyway and it can lead to a false sense of security.

Parental role modelling

Ever catch yourself checking your email, using your smartphone or watching TV while your child is trying to talk to you? We should set a good example by putting down the device and communicating with our children face to face. Having meals in front of the TV belongs to a bygone era for most, but reaching for our smartphones during meal times is a modern equivalent. It tells the child that constant screen time is acceptable. We should think about background noise as well; passive viewing or listening ruins a child’s concentration. For instance, a child’s attention will wander if the TV is on in another part of the room.

In School

All of the topics referenced are taught in school. As well as the extensive work in PSHE, our updated 2016-7 computing curriculum specifically covers the following areas:

1. Dangers of sharing passwords
2. Safely communicating with others online.
3. Sharing images online
4. The differences between communicating online and in real life
5. Keeping personal information online private
6. Mobile phone etiquette.

These topics are taught in an age-appropriate way. In addition, we take part in the annual Safer Internet Day run by the UK Safer Internet Centre.

In friendship

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