Supporting your Child's Mental Wellness:
Screen Use for Children aged 5-12

📱 **This is an emerging area of research. However, we know that there are both benefits and risks of screen use.[1]**

[1](Canadian Pediatric Society, 2019)

Potential benefits include[1]:

✓ Social connections and friendships, self-expression and creativity

✓ Learning opportunities, cognitive and social development

Risks include[1]:

✓ Behaviour and conduct challenges, negative impacts on learning and academic outcomes

✓ Negative impacts to mental health, decreased sleep quantity and quality, impacts to vision health, and lower levels of physical activity

How much screen time is too much?

The Canadian 24 hour movement guidelines recommend that children 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.**

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.

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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. Ask questions like "what do you like about this show/app/game?" or "how does it make you feel after watching/using/playing it?"
- Let your child know that they can talk to you about anything negative or upsetting they see online. If they've gotten a phone and have started texting friends, check in about how those interactions are going.
- Continue to be present and engaged when screens are used. Whenever possible, **co-view and talk about content with children.**

2) Content- When using screens, prioritize activities that are educational, active, or social.

- Help children choose developmentally appropriate content and recognize problematic content or behaviours. 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.
- **Consider using parental controls with the ultimate goal of having your child begin to manage their own limits as they grow older.**

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

- **Support kids in settling their bodies to sleep by putting devices away at least 1 hour before bedtime.** Teach them techniques such as deep breathing and listening to quiet music to help calm their brains.
- When your child is bored, try going outside to play, do something creative, or play a game together instead of using screens.

4) Crowding Out- Instead of focusing on 'reducing screen time,' think about what your family wants 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, play outside, draw, hangout, and play sports with other kids. Parents can role model putting phones down at bedtime, dinnertime, or on car rides - whatever makes sense for your family's media plan.

BC Children's Hospital
Provincial Health Services Authority

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre

For more information or support, please contact:
https://keltymentalhealth.ca/

Vancouver Coastal Health