

Balancing screen time

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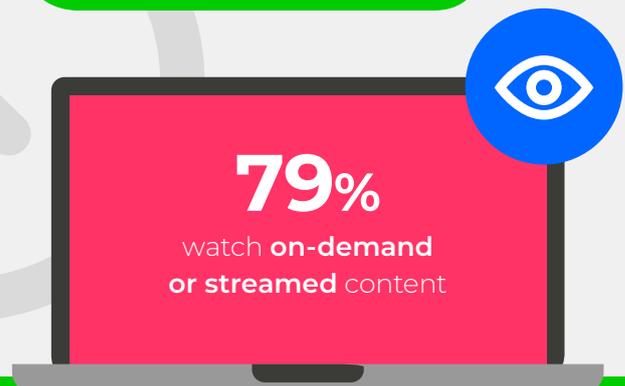
Top tips to support children 14+ (Key stage 4)

Smartphones are central to teen's daily routine, if not integral to it. Whether it's sending something on Snapchat to keep a streak going as soon as they wake up, getting up to speed on news on Twitter or live streaming thoughts about their day on social media, it can be hard to keep teens away from screens.

To support teens, it's more about equipping them with the tools to self-regulate their own screen time and be critical about how it is impacting their well-being. Find tips and advice to help them do just that.



How are children using screens?



Source: Ofcom Adults: Media use and attitudes report 2019

What do parents say about screen time?

Less screen time limits

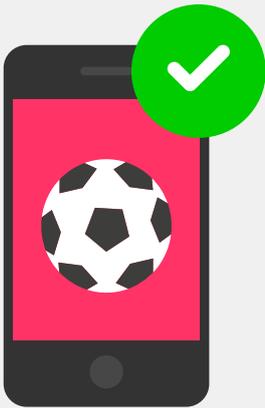
Although overall almost 9 in 10 parents take measures to limit their child's use of devices, parents of teens are less likely to take any measures. As they get older it is important that they have more freedom and less restrictions – they need to start to develop the skills to manage this on their own.

Increased use of social media

Half of parents of 14–16s are concerned about their children's use of social media and its impact on their overall mental wellbeing.

Source: *Internet Matters Look both ways report*

What are the benefits and challenges of screen use?



Screen time benefits

- Screen use provides a range of opportunities for creativity and learning – **70% of parents strongly agree that using devices is essential** for their child's development
Source: [Internet Matters Look both ways report](#).
- **Gives children access to a wealth of information** to build their knowledge and technology takes away physical barriers to social connections to make children less isolated.
- **The internet can also be inspirational for children** with a certain passion in particular when discovering content and sharing their own content.



Screen time challenges

- **Peer pressure from friends to stay online and constant use of devices and features** like auto-play on platforms can be habit forming and encourage children to spend longer on screens.
- **An increase in interactions online** can make it more likely that teens may come across fake news or inappropriate content that can influence them in a negative way.
- **Long periods of passive screen time** (i.e bingeing on box sets) can have a physical effect on teens development (i.e. eyes, brain), sleep cycle and behaviour.



5 top tips to balance screen time

1 Help them prioritise key tasks over screens

It can be tempting for children to **multitask with a screen** but often it can become a distraction. To help them strike a healthy balance it's important to set simple rules that they can follow.

Putting their phone on 'do not disturb' when doing important activities like homework, creating device free zones in the home and taking regular breaks from tech are a great start to help them prioritise family time and sleep over screens. Also, setting a good example with your own screen time use is essential.

2 Stay engaged in what they do online

Learn how they communicate with others online to better guide them as they become more socially active online and draw from friends, passions and online sources to build their identity. The more you get involved and understand the things your children do

online, the easier it is to gain their respect and influence what they do in their digital world. Also, making screens part of family time, like a movie or an online games night is one way to make it more inclusive and engaging.

3 Equip them with know-how to manage risks online

Be open and honest about the online risks teens face so they feel confident to talk to you if they get into trouble online – and don't overreact – remember that the dialogue is important and you want them to come back to you the next time they need support.

Also, make them aware of practical things they can do to deal with risks online, like blocking and reporting on the platforms they use. It's also important to remind them to think carefully about what they post and share with others online to help them maintain a positive online reputation that will serve them well later on in life when applying for a job or higher education.

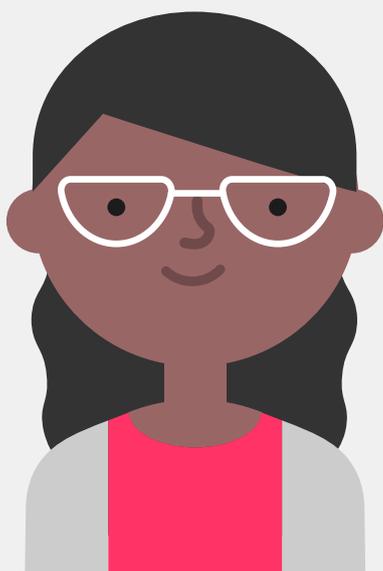
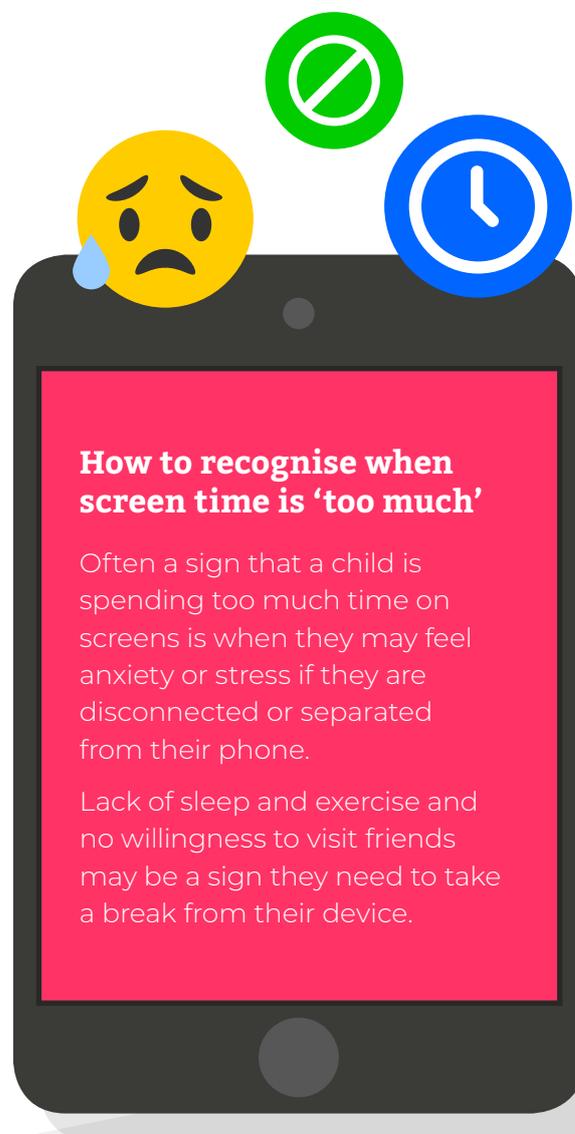
4 Encourage them to self-regulate their screen time

Whatever devices your teen uses, **take the time to sit together and review** the free tools available to help them assess the time they spend online and make them aware of privacy settings they can use to stay in control of what they share. Also, looking at app permissions can be a powerful way to get them to understand what can happen with their data.

All consoles and some social platforms have in-built settings that allow you to set alerts to tell you when you've reached a certain amount of time on the platform and gives you a summary of time spent to support digital wellbeing.

5 Encourage them to be selective about what they do online

It's important to make teens aware that most platforms are purposely built to keep them watching or playing, this can help them avoid mindless scrolling. **Encourage them to be more critical about the media they watch and the platforms they use** and to explore apps and websites that will compliment what they enjoy in the real world and develop their key skills.



The truth about screen time

Not all screen time is created equal so it's important to encourage children to have a healthy balance between passive screen time (i.e watching YouTube) and interactive screen time (i.e. creating content or playing games online).

There is no safe level of screen time but it doesn't mean that all screen time is harmful. Lack of evidence has meant that experts have found it hard to recommend a cut-off for children screen time overall.

One size does not fit all when it comes to screen time – it's more about getting it right for your families needs.

Visit internetmatters.org/screentime for more advice

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