

## 9 secrets to managing your child's screen time

When you limit screen time, you give your child the gift of more time to read, engage in active play, and be a healthier child.

by: GreatSchools Staff (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/author/greatschoolsstaff/>) | June 10, 2016



Is your child spending more time staring at a screen than playing? Kids 8 and under spend around two hours a day with some sort of screen (TV, tablet, smart phone, or video game), according to Common Sense Media's 2013 study, *Zero to Eight: Children's Media Use in America* (<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/zero-to-eight-childrens-media-use-in-america-2013>). And the older the child, the more they're lured in by the glowing screen: children ages 8 to 18 spend, on average, close to 45 hours per week watching TV, playing video games, instant messaging, and listening to music online — far more time than they spend with their parents or in the classroom, according to a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation (<http://www.kff.org/entmedia/entmedia030905pkg.cfm>). While media exposure can be beneficial, research abounds on how much and what subject matter is appropriate for children.

### More studies sound the alarms

Childhood obesity is on the rise. The *New England Journal of Medicine* notes in a 2008 study that one in four preschoolers is obese and a 2014 study found a disturbing trend of "weight fate" in which a third of children who were overweight in kindergarten were obese by 8th grade. Experts say it's because kids aren't getting enough exercise and eating a healthy diet. Too much screen time — whether it be in front of a TV, computer, or video game — is part of the problem.

Another study by the Center on Media and Child Health (<http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/160/4/387>) found that children who watched violent content spent less time with friends than children who watched nonviolent content, resulting in more isolation. Other research has linked television watching to an increased rate of aggressive physical and verbal behavior in children.

Children who spend too much time in front of the TV or computer have "little time for exercising their predispositions for fantasy, imagination, and creativity," writes child development professor and best-selling author David Elkind in his book *The Power of Play: How Spontaneous, Imaginative Activities Lead to Happier and Healthier Children*. Other critics note that it is very difficult to prove a direct cause-and-effect relationship between media exposure and emotional and behavioral problems. But savvy parents should certainly be on the lookout for signs of behavioral changes in their children and adjust media exposure accordingly.

### What's a parent to do?

With the array of media available for our kids today — and their amazing ability to watch TV, instant message, and listen to music all at the same time — what's the best way to balance media exposure with other activities? How can you monitor what and how much your child consumes? Two organizations offer tools and reviews to help parents navigate the fast-moving media world.

Common Sense Media ([http://www.commonsensemedia.org/?utm\\_source=greatschools&utm\\_medium=newsletter&utm\\_term=jul19](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/?utm_source=greatschools&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_term=jul19)) is devoted to providing "trustworthy information and tools, as well as an independent forum, so that families can have a choice and a voice about the media they consume."

“Media is a force for negative as well as positive,” says Peter Katz, director of marketing for the nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. “You wouldn’t let your child eat junk food 24 hours a day. Just as children need a moderate diet of food, so do they need a moderate media diet. Parents need to make informed decisions.”

The Parents’ Choice Foundation (<http://www.parents-choice.org/>), the nation’s oldest nonprofit guide to children’s media, is another source of information for parents seeking guidance.

“Kids are tired of being told what they can’t do and what they can’t see. They want to know what they can do and see,” says Claire Green, Parents’ Choice president. Parents’ Choice conducts an annual awards program and reviews books, toys, music, television, software, video games, Web sites and magazines. “Parents have tough jobs,” Green says. “They must be cheerleaders and goalkeepers, fence builders, and fence menders. Parents must do their best to keep their children safe, keep them well, open their minds — and remember to shut the back door.”

## Guidelines for managing your child’s media consumption

### 1 **Know your kids and know your values.**

If your child complains that all his friends are watching a particular TV show that contains a lot of sex and or violence, explain what your values are and why you are sticking to them. Or if you know your child is more prone to nightmares than his friend, exercise caution in letting him watch scary shows, even if all his friends are watching them.

### 2 **Be conscious of age-appropriateness.**

“What’s OK for 8 isn’t OK for 4,” says Green. Use your judgment and consult media reviews. Be aware that although several companies are marketing videos for babies and toddlers, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no television for children under the age of 2. And a PG-13 rating on a movie doesn’t necessarily mean that all 13-year-olds are ready to see it or that younger children shouldn’t see it. It’s a guideline and it’s up to you to decide.

### 3 **Set family rules and stick to them.**

“It’s just like anything else in parenting,” says Katz. “You’ve got to set guidelines.” You could say, for example, that watching TV is OK from 7 to 9 p.m. or after the homework is done or only on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Consistency through the years is also important. Katz adds: “If you are a permissive parent for the first six years, it makes it harder to switch that off later on.”

### 4 **Limit screen time.**

“While most experts recommend no more than one to two hours of screen time (TV, DVDs, computers and video games) per day, most kids are in front of a screen 45 hours per week,” says Katz. It’s important to consider that it’s not just TV but all forms of media that need to be considered when setting guidelines. “Kids need to have time to go outside and play, and pull from other experiences besides the media,” notes Green.

### 5 **Use technology to control the media.**

TiVo, DVDs and videotapes of programs are easier to control and a better bet than watching whatever is on. Green says that these are all great tools because a parent can hit the pause button, talk to their kids and discuss certain scenes or behaviors as they are happening.

### 6 **Have regular family movie nights and use them as opportunities to watch together and discuss. Be on the alert for teachable moments. “Pose questions like ‘Why do you think the characters are being mean to each other?’” suggests Katz.**

7

## Keep media out of kids' bedrooms.

Great!  
SCHOOLS

it's much easier to exercise control when your child is within view. So that means keeping video games, the TV and the computer in a common area where you can keep an eye on things.

8

## Check what the experts have to say.

Common Sense Media ([http://www.commonsensemedia.org/?](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/?utm_source=greatschools&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_term=jul19)

[utm\\_source=greatschools&utm\\_medium=newsletter&utm\\_term=jul19](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/?utm_source=greatschools&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_term=jul19)) has more than 8,000 reviews of a range of media: movies, TV programs, music, videos, Web sites, books and magazines. The organization is continually adding to the site, with a major "upload" of new reviews once a week and a free weekly email newsletter. Common Sense Media reviewers are looking at media from a child development perspective. "We don't only review media that is considered 'squeaky clean,'" says Katz. Reviewers consider a range of media and take into account what is particularly popular with kids.

To help parents make informed choices, Parents' Choice gives annual awards for books, toys, music and storytelling, magazines, software, video games, television and websites. You can read reviews of award-winning products on the Parents' Choice ([http://www.parents-choice.org/awards\\_portal.cfm](http://www.parents-choice.org/awards_portal.cfm)) site, and you can look for the Parents' Choice seal on products when you shop. The organization also has a free email newsletter you can sign up for.

Awards are given at several levels: gold, silver honors, recommended, approved, classic and FunStuff. Parents' Choice looks for products that "entertain and teach with flair, stimulate imagination and inspire creativity." To be considered, products must not have any violent impact or project racial or gender stereotypes. All products go through a multifaceted review process, including reviews from staff and students at schools and day care centers, child development experts, directors of education at museums and experts in their field. "If we need to review a game about dinosaurs, we'll find a paleontologist to check it out for accuracy," says Green. Only 20% of products that are considered receive an award.

"We consider Parents' Choice a watchdog with a sense of humor," says Green. "We have to recognize that kids need to have fun. They are overstressed and overscheduled." Quality media can provide an avenue for that fun.

9

**Green recommends storytelling tapes. "There's an art to storytelling. A good storyteller can pull a child into the story while letting him use his imagination because not every picture is drawn for him," she notes. The act of listening to a story builds listening skills and trains a child to concentrate and give his undivided attention. Green notes that so many children are growing up multitasking among different media that they lose the ability to focus on one task at a time.**

## Additional resources

*The Power of Play: How Spontaneous, Imaginative Activities Lead to Happier and Healthier Children*, by David Elkind (Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2007)

*The Other Parent: The Inside Story of the Media's Effect on Our Children*, by James Steyer; afterword by Chelsea Clinton (Atria, 2003)

*The Plug-In Drug: Television, Computers, and Family Life* by Marie Winn (Penguin, 2002)

Screen time (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/tag/screentime/>)



### About the author

GreatSchools Staff (<http://www.greatschools.org/gk/author/greatschoolsstaff/>)

GreatSchools is the leading national nonprofit empowering parents to unlock educational opportunities for their children. We provide school information and parenting resources to help millions of American families choose the right school, support learning at home, and guide their children to great futures.

Support GreatSchools in this effort! Donate Now! (<https://greatschools.networkforgood.com/>)

Join us

- [Supporters \(/gk/supporters/\)](/gk/supporters/)
- [Licensing \(/gk/licensing/\)](/gk/licensing/)
- [Sponsorship \(/gk/sponsorship/\)](/gk/sponsorship/)
- [Advertising \(/gk/advertising/\)](/gk/advertising/)
- [Careers \(/gk/careers/\)](/gk/careers/)

Learn more

- [Newsletter](#)
- [Privacy policy \(/gk/privacy/\)](/gk/privacy/)
- [Terms of use \(/gk/terms/\)](/gk/terms/)
- [About us \(/gk/about/\)](/gk/about/)
- [Contact us \(/gk/contact/\)](/gk/contact/)

Connect

- [Facebook \(http://www.facebook.com/greatschools\)](http://www.facebook.com/greatschools)
- [Twitter \(http://www.twitter.com/greatschools\)](http://www.twitter.com/greatschools)
- [Pinterest \(http://pinterest.com/greatschools/\)](http://pinterest.com/greatschools/)
- [YouTube \(http://www.youtube.com/greatschools\)](http://www.youtube.com/greatschools)
- [Instagram \(http://www.instagram.com/greatschools/\)](http://www.instagram.com/greatschools/)