# Screen Time Boundaries

### Advice for parents and carers with children aged 0 to 7.

When it comes to children and technology, parents and carers have long been asking the same question:

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#### How much screen time is OK for my child?

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) have produced guidance for screen time use of under-18s. Following research into this area, they have advised that no set amount of time is necessary to adhere to but that devices should not replace sleep, exercise or family time. They advise that devices should be avoided in the hour before bed to promote healthy sleep and have provided the following checklist to help parents and carers make decisions about their family's screen time use:

* Is your family's screen time under control?
* Does screen use interfere with what your family want to do?
* Does screen use interfere with sleep?
* Are you able to control snacking during screen time?

Dr Russel Viner, President of the RCPCH comments on screen time, stating that,

*"One size doesn't fit all, parents need to think about what's useful and helpful for their child."*

*"Parents should consider their own use of screens, if screen time is controlled in their family, and if excessive use is affecting their child's development and everyday life."*

Trying to actively count or keep track of screen time hours can be problematic and raise anxiety levels unnecessarily. Instead, forming a family media plan that takes into account screen time, when and where devices are accessible and what content can be accessed will be beneficial for the whole family.

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### Top Tips to get you started:

Although a one-size-fits-all solution would arguably be unrealistic, there are lots of simple things you can do as a parent/carer to ensure that you feel confident about your child’s interaction with technology, and set achievable goals that work for your family.

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### Use digital devices together

### Get involved in your child’s online activities. Have fun, play games and learn together online, just as you would in the physical world. It will then be natural for your child to turn to you if they experience anything upsetting online.

### Take an interest

### Talk to your children about the game, TV show or app that they are using. Ask questions such as, ‘What do you need to do? How does it work? What have you learnt?’ etc. By engaging with your child you open the lines of communication, bond with them, and encourage them to share their experiences with you.

### Get involved

### One of the best ways to understand what your child enjoys doing online is to use it with them. You could start by playing an online game together or by looking for information together.

### Be supportive

### Talk to your child about what to do if something online makes them feel uncomfortable, worried or upset. Reassure them that you are here to help and for them always to tell a trusted adult if they need help or before using a device.

### Set clear expectations

### Clear family rules can help your child have a positive start to their digital life and get the most out of being online. Ask your child to help create some family rules.

### A family agreement is a brilliant way of setting your own boundaries in advance, creating consistent routines, and developing positive habits. It can also evolve as your child’s use and understanding of technology develops. You might want to include the use of countdowns so that children are aware of how much time they have left on devices, or allocate designated screen-free time periods or zones – e.g. in the hour before bedtime or in the bedroom itself.

### Decide what is appropriate

### Install apps and select websites, games and videos which are age appropriate. You can use reviews and ratings to help you do this or look on websites like [NetAware](https://www.net-aware.org.uk/) for more information. Create shortcuts or links for your child to use when browsing the internet and consider setting up parental controls.

### Consider how the rules will be applied

### Remember that your child will engage with technology in a variety of places, some of which may be without you present, e.g. school, family or friends houses. Talk to your child about how to keep safe online wherever they may be and reassure them about the different people who are there to help, e.g. teachers, grandparents etc.

### Share your rules with any family or friends who may be caring for your child.

### Be informed

### Many digital devices, services and content providers offer a range of parental controls. You can choose the type of content and options that are suitable for your child.

### Be selective

### There are some great quality preschool and infant TV shows, games and apps available. Using dedicated children’s on-demand services can offer peace of mind when it comes to the quality of what your child accesses. Be sure to read the reviews and check age limits before viewing anything if you are concerned about the content.

### Take control

### Consider which devices your child will have access to and whether they are shared as a family or belong to your child. There are different parental controls you can apply at device level and on your home Wi-Fi. You can also make use of settings on the service itself.

### Consider usage

### Consider how your child will engage with online content and what it will allow them to do. This could be searching for content, viewing videos and images, gaming or chatting.

### Be aware

### If your children are accessing high-quality, age-appropriate media and their screen time activities are balanced with a healthy range of screen free ones, there should be little cause for concern. If you notice a change in your child’s attitude or behaviour, disrupted sleep patterns, waning interests in offline hobbies or you are worried about their social engagement with peers then review their online activities and make the necessary adjustments.

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### Establish good habits early on

### Both adults and children enjoy sharing moments with family and friends through online images and videos. Starting conversations and good habits early on is a great way to support children in staying safe online.

### Set an example

### Remember that you are your child’s role model and so if your goal is to use your devices more sparingly, and adhere to any rules that you have set e.g. device free meal times, then it is important to set a good example. If you need to use your device for something then consider explaining what you are doing and why, e.g. ‘I just need to message (insert name) and ask them to pick up milk on the way home!’

### Get creative

### Use the games, apps or TV shows as a starting point for getting creative at home. Does your child love mixing ingredients, or spreading pizza toppings within a baking game? Why not allow them to help you the next time you’re making food. Plenty of children’s TV channels have their own websites with fantastic activity suggestions that are specifically designed to fire up the imagination.

Source: <https://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers/hot-topics/screen-time-boundaries>