# Four Tips for Managing Your Kids' Screen Time
– tip sheet

If you've ever seen kids' eyes glaze over during the third hour of a cartoon marathon, or had to take away a game device over pleas to "just let me finish this level," you have some idea why screen time is an issue. Here are four important steps to take to keep screen time under control and make screen use a valuable part of your kids' lives.

Minimize screen use, especially for the youngest children

- Try to expose babies and toddlers to as little screen time as possible, whether it's TV and videos or interactive media like educational apps. (The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends no screen time for children under two). If you have older children as well, explain to them why they need to limit screen time around their younger siblings.

- Help older kids understand from early on that using screens is a health issue, like eating well or brushing your teeth. Just like kids can understand that some foods are better than others and that too much of anything can be bad for you, they can learn to make good choices about screens.
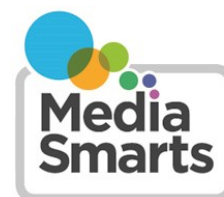
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- Set limits that include all screens and establish certain times and places as no-screen zones. Screens should stay out of bedrooms and away from the dinner table, and should be turned off and put away at least an hour before bedtime.

Use screens mindfully, as an activity you choose, rather than as something that is on in the background or that you turn on as a habit.

- A big step in controlling your media time is becoming mindful of it. Turning on a TV, computer or mobile device should be something you do at particular times, for particular reasons: when you're not using them they should be turned all the way off (not just on "sleep") and put away if possible. Make sure kids don't get in the habit of turning devices on as soon as they sit down and don't have screens on as "background noise."

- Get creative! It's not unusual for kids to get obsessed with the characters and settings in their favourite shows and games, and it doesn't have to be unhealthy. When screen time is over, encourage them to draw, write or act out stories about their favourite characters so they don't have to say goodbye when the screen goes dark.

Mitigate media effects by curating your children's media, setting household rules, and co-viewing when possible.

- With younger kids, select their media choices yourself, and only allow older kids to watch or play media you've approved. There can be worrying content in media for all ages, and for kids over two the quality of the content can make the difference between a positive and a negative viewing experience.

- Whenever possible, co-watch with your kids. Educational media is most effective when it's watched with parents who can help to extend and reinforce the learning content, and co-viewing is the best way to spot and talk about troubling content in media: MediaSmarts' tip sheet Co-Viewing With Your Kids can help you do this. When you can't watch together, make sure you're familiar with the content of everything your kids are watching and playing so you can talk to them about anything that worries you.

Model good media use for your kids.

- Before we can teach kids to use screens mindfully, we have to do it ourselves. Pay attention to your own media use, and think about what messages you're sending with it. You can also develop a family screen plan to show that managing screen time is important for everyone, not just kids.

- Think about ways to use screens together as a family, whether it's video chatting with distant friends and relatives or using the Internet to investigate hobbies and interests together.

These tips are based on the Canadian Paediatric Society's Position Statement *Screen time and young children: Promoting health and development in a digital world*.