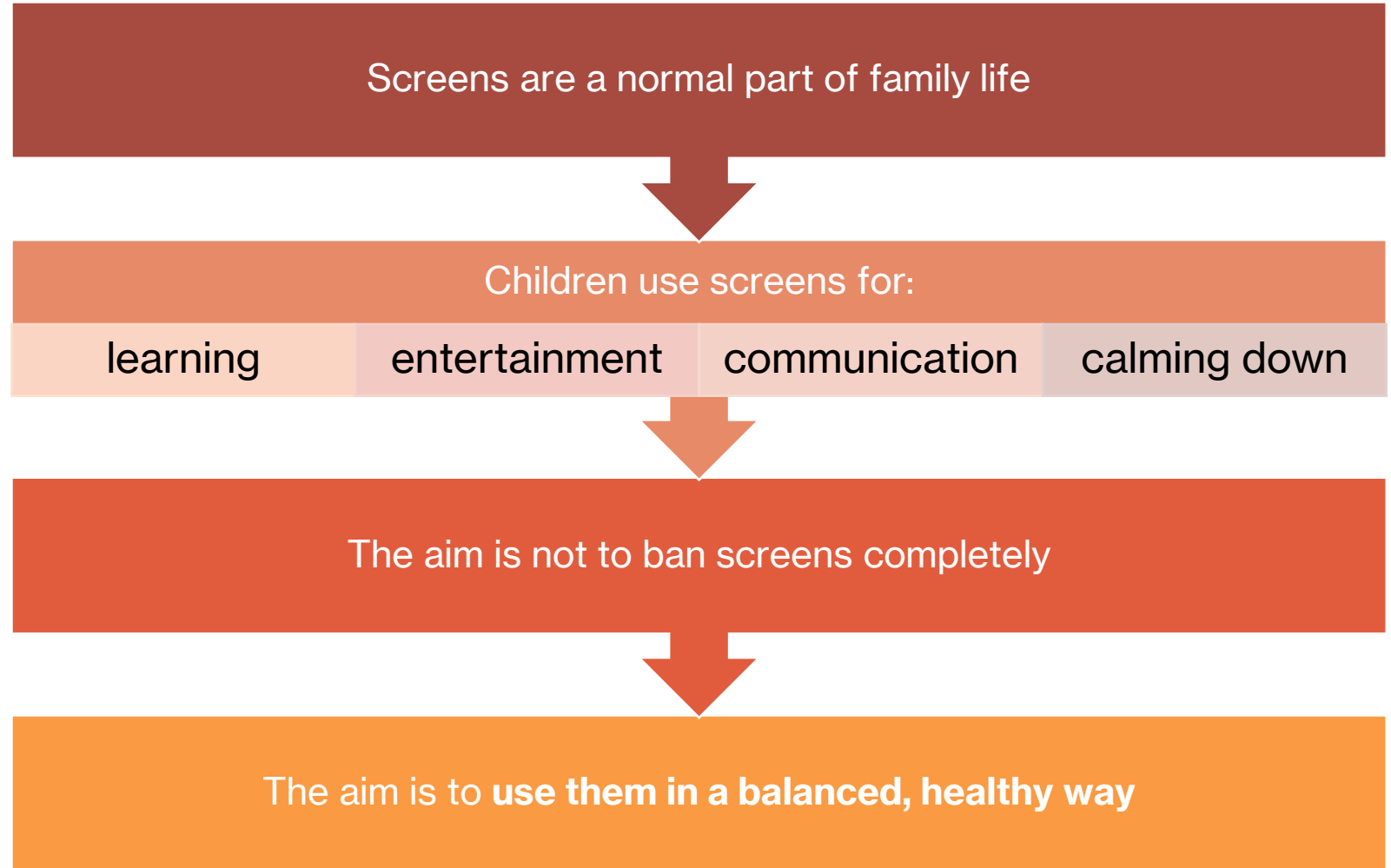




Screen Time for Children **Supporting healthy habits at home**

Tuesday 28th April 2026

Why talk about screen time?



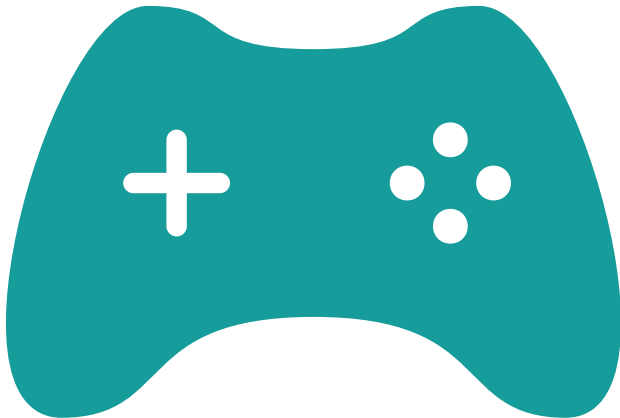


What screens do your children use?



Which software/apps do your children use?

What the research tells us



- Too much screen time can affect:
 - **sleep**
 - **physical activity**
 - **attention and concentration**
 - **language and social development**
 - **behaviour and emotional regulation**
- High-quality evidence suggests the **content**, **timing** and **context** of screen use matter as much as the amount
- Co-viewing and adult support can make screen use more beneficial, especially for younger children
- Screens used close to bedtime can make it harder for children to settle and sleep well

National guidance for under-5s

Based on current national advice:

Under 2s

- Avoid screen time where possible, except for video calling with family and friends

Ages 2-5

- Keep screen time limited
- Prioritise sleep, play, reading, conversation and active time

For very young children, screens should **not replace**:

- face-to-face interaction
- outdoor play
- sleep
- meals
- family routines

Guidance for under 11s

- Limit to Two Hours Non-Educational Screen Time Daily
- For primary school-aged children, **screen time recommendations by age** become more flexible, but still clear. They can use devices for schoolwork, but **non-educational screen time** should stay under two hours per day. The aim is balance.





Screen use can:

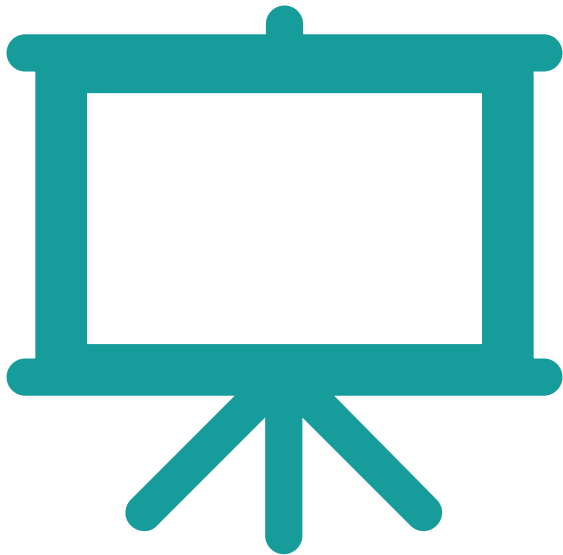
- **delay bedtime**
- **overstimulate children**
- **make it harder to unwind**
- **The blue light from screens and stimulating content can both affect sleep**

Best practice:

- **switch off screens at least an hour before bed**
- **create a calm bedtime routine**
- **keep devices out of bedrooms if possible**

Screen time and sleep

Screen time and learning



- Screens can support learning when used well
- Educational content works best when children:
 - are actively engaged
 - talk about what they see
 - connect screen content to real-world experiences
- For younger children, learning is strongest through:
 - play
 - conversation
 - books
 - practical activities
 - movement
- Screens can support learning, but they should not replace the experiences children need most.

Not all screen time is the same: The amount of screen time matters, but the type of screen time matters too.

- **Passive screen time**

- watching videos
- scrolling
- background television

- **Interactive screen time**

- games
- apps
- quizzes
- video calls

- **Educational screen time**

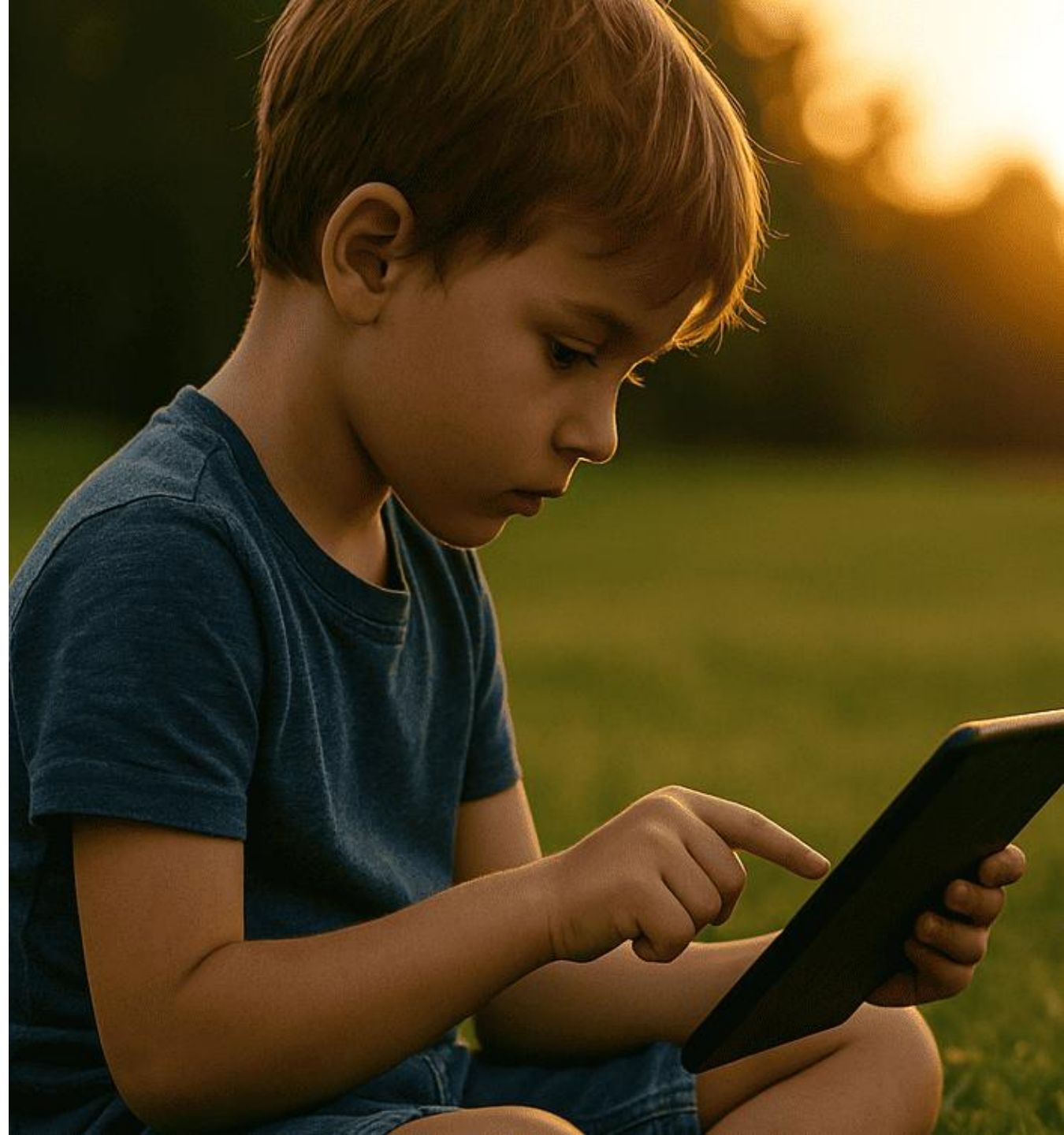
- learning apps
- stories
- phonics or maths activities

- **Creative screen time**

- making music
- drawing
- coding
- filming or editing simple projects

Which types are most helpful?

- **Some screen time is more beneficial than others.**
- **Most helpful**
 - interactive and educational content
 - screen use with an adult
 - content that encourages talking, thinking or creating
- **Less helpful**
 - long periods of passive watching
 - endless scrolling
 - screens used as a constant distraction
- **Watch out for**
 - content that is too fast-paced or overstimulating
 - screen use replacing sleep, play or family time
- **Top tip:**
If screen time is being used, ask:
- Is my child **watching, learning, creating** or just **passing time**?
- Could this screen time lead to conversation, play or learning afterwards?



Signs screen time may be becoming a problem

Parents may want to review routines if their child:

struggles to stop using screens

becomes very upset when screens are taken away

is less interested in play, reading or outdoor activity

has poorer sleep

seems more irritable or distracted

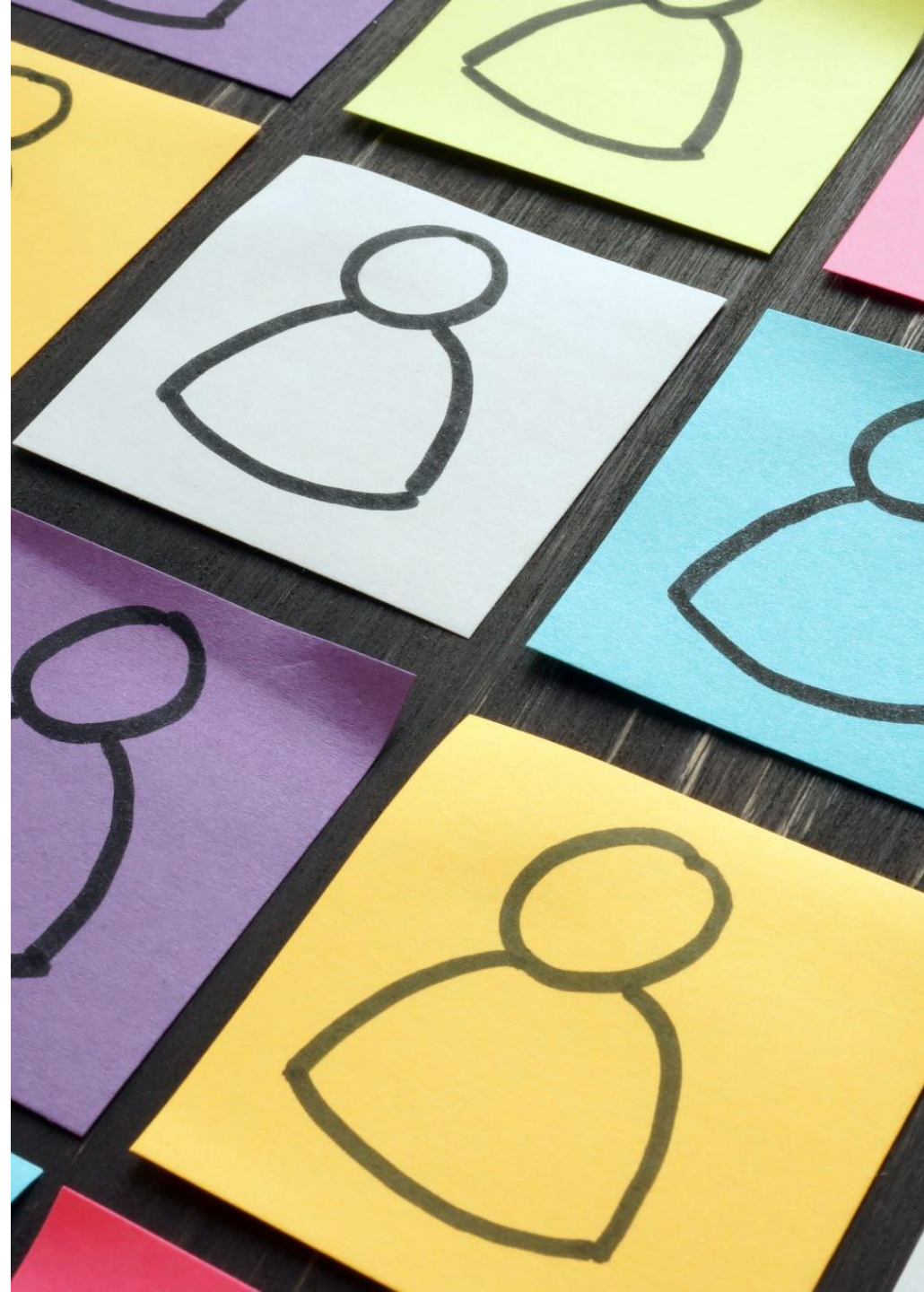
uses screens instead of talking or playing with others

What parents can do

Set	Set clear routines for when screens can be used
Keep	Keep mealtimes screen-free where possible
Avoid	Avoid screens before bedtime
Choose	Choose age-appropriate, high-quality content
Watch	Watch with children where possible
Talk about	Talk about what they are watching
Use	Use parental controls and safe settings
Model	Model healthy screen habits as adults

A balanced family approach

- Set family rules together where appropriate
- Be consistent
- Use screens intentionally, not automatically
- Balance screen time with:
 - physical activity
 - sleep
 - family time
 - reading
 - creative play
- Remember that occasional exceptions are normal





Practical tips for home

- Create screen-free zones, such as bedrooms or the dining table
- Use timers for younger children
- Have a basket or charging station for devices
- Keep some “always available” alternatives:
 - books
 - colouring
 - construction toys
 - puzzles
 - outdoor play equipment
- Plan ahead for travel or waiting times

Parental controls

Most devices now have parental control options.

Look at the NSPCC website: [Use Parental Controls to Keep Your Child Safe | NSPCC](#)

Some Apps are easier than others.

Take time to understand **how** to use parental controls before saying yes to children's requests.

Understand PEGI ratings: [Understanding PEGI age ratings for games | Parent Zone](#)

[Please read this information: a-guide-to-age-ratings-of-apps-and-games.pdf](#)

Parent controls

Microsoft devices (Windows computers and Xbox)

- Getting started with Microsoft Family Safety: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/account-billing/getting-started-with-microsoft-family-safety-b6280c9d-38d7-82ff-0e4f-a6cb7e659344>
- Family-friendly gaming for everyone, Xbox: <https://www.xbox.com/en-GB/family-hub>

iPads and iPhones

- Use parental controls on your child's iPhone or iPad: <https://support.apple.com/en-gb/105121>

Android phones

- Manage devices, apps and screen time: <https://support.google.com/families/topic/7336331>
- Get started with Family Link: <https://support.google.com/families/answer/7101025?hl=en>

Fire Tablet

- Set up parental controls on your Fire Tablet: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=GG2LBLF5V2T8XUX8>

PlayStation

- How to set up family accounts on PSN: <https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/support/account/playstation-family-account-set-up/>
- How to set up parental controls on PlayStation consoles: <https://www.playstation.com/en-gb/support/account/ps5-parental-controls-spending-limits/>

Nintendo Switch

- Nintendo Switch parental controls: <https://www.nintendo.com/en-gb/Hardware/Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls/Nintendo-Switch-Parental-Controls-1183145.html>
- Nintendo Switch support pages: <https://www.nintendo.com/en-gb/Search/Search-299117.html?f=147397-3958-143-42>
- How to set Nintendo eShop restrictions: <https://www.nintendo.com/en-gb/Support/Nintendo-Switch/How-to-Set-Nintendo-eShop-Restrictions-1406403.html>

Key takeaways

Screen time is part
of modern life

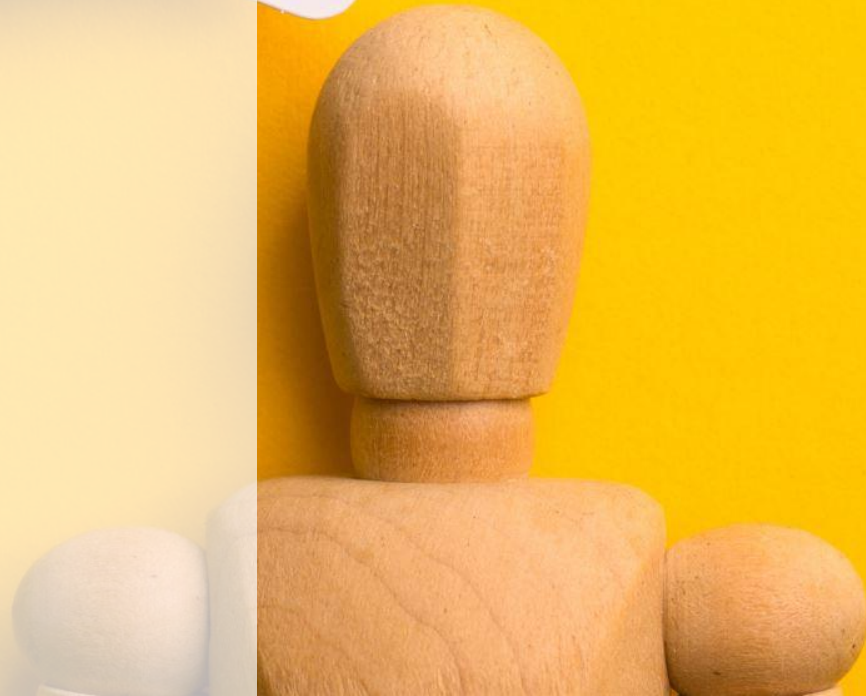
For young children,
less is better

The **type of content,**
time of day and
adult involvement
all matter

Sleep, play, talk and
movement are
essential

Families do not need
perfection - just
clear, healthy
routines

Questions and discussion



Your child's screen time

Know the risks, and what you can do to help keep your child safe.

What's the problem?

Spending time online and on devices can be a positive thing, especially for educational use.

However, high levels of screen time can put your child at greater risk of:

- Being bullied online

- Abuse and grooming (when someone builds a relationship with a child to exploit or abuse them)

- Seeing inappropriate content

- Not getting enough sleep and exercise

- Disruption to learning and studying

- Negative effects on mental wellbeing

While it may be tempting to ban devices altogether, this also has some risks, as it can:

- Cause children to keep any screen time a secret, making it more difficult for them to seek help with bullying, harmful content or potential grooming

- Make children more prone to grooming, as abusers could offer them a 'secret' device

- Slow technology skill development. Technology is part of everyday life, and teaching children how to benefit from it can help prepare them for the future and develop online safety skills

- Block access to resources that could be beneficial, such as educational apps or websites

4 steps you can take to protect your child

1) Set parental controls on devices

Use parental controls to restrict access to in-app purchases and explicit or age-rated content, and, on some devices, how long your child can spend on the device or certain apps.

You'll likely need to set a password for parental controls. Make sure it's different from the password used to access the device, and that your child doesn't know it.

Parental controls can be different for each device. See below for instructions for some popular devices.

2) Agree rules on screen time

There are mixed views on 'safe' screen time, but you could agree some limits to stop screen time interfering with your child's sleep or family activities:

Make a plan together, and stick to it. You could set media-free times and zones, like during meals or in bedrooms

Try to avoid screens an hour before bedtime

Model the behaviour you want to see – this may mean no screen time for you at the times agreed with your child. Children are more likely to learn from example

Try to minimise snacking during screen time

Turn not using screens into a game, using apps like [Forest](#), where not using devices is rewarded (<https://www.forestapp.cc/>)

3) Talk to your child about staying safe online

Discuss the restrictions and why they're needed. Teach them:

That anyone can pretend to be a child online

That if they talk to people they don't know, not to give away personal information – like what street they live on or where they go to school – or to share their location with them. To say no if they are asked for images or videos of themselves, and to stop talking to the other person if they are asked for these things

To set their profiles to private, to limit what others can see

To be 'share aware' – think carefully about what they share and with whom. Once it's out there, they have no control over what the other person does with it. Remember, it's illegal to take, share or possess sexual images of under-18s, full stop

If they see something that upsets them, or someone bullies them, to tell an adult they trust. Bullying and upsetting content is not their fault.

If you don't feel confident starting a conversation with your child about what they're doing online, take a look at this advice from the NSPCC: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/talking-child-online-safety/>

4) Encourage off-screen activities

Help your child get physically active for the recommended 60 minutes a day:

See www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities for free ideas for activities and games

Consider local sports or activity clubs. Your local authority or council should have details on youth clubs and activity groups near you. Find your local authority here:

<https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>

Try an app that's designed to get children active – see examples at:

www.internetmatters.org/resources/apps-guide/apps-to-help-kids-get-active/

How to set parental controls

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Sources used in this guide

This guide was produced by [The Key Safeguarding](https://safeguarding.thekeysupport.com/): <https://safeguarding.thekeysupport.com/>

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<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/covid-19-lockdown-measures-and-childrens-screen-time/>

[Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people, GOV.UK – Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and UK Council for Internet Safety](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sharing-nudes-and-semi-nudes-advice-for-education-settings-working-with-children-and-young-people>

[Screen time: impacts on education and wellbeing – report summary, UK Parliament](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmeduc/118/summary.html)

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