

Family Fundamentals

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Too much screen time? A word on setting limits

My 12-year-old daughter is using our family's mobile device quite a bit this summer, primarily playing games, watching videos and chatting with friends. My wife and I agree that she's getting too much screen time, but we disagree on setting limits. Do you have any recommendations?

You are not alone. A point of contention in many families these days is limiting children's time in front of screens — whether they're televisions, computers, tablets, games or smartphones. In late 2013, the American Academy of Pediatrics set some guidelines based on research saying that the average 8- to 10-year-old spends nearly 8 hours and teens spend more than 11 hours a day in front of a screen. In addition, the academy reported that about 75 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds own cell phones, but two-thirds of children and teenagers said their parents had set no rules about time spent using those phones or other media.

It's not just the amount of screentime that's a concern, but also content: What are young people looking at or listening to? Plus, youth who spend so much time on electronic devices may not be getting the recommended amount of physical activity, which could lead to weight gain.

For those reasons, the academy recommends no more than 1 to 2 hours of screentime per day for children over 2 years old, and even less for children under age 2.

That said, setting limits with a preteen could take all of your parenting muster. Sure, you could just take the tablet and put it under lock and key for 22 hours a day, but your daughter would likely just see that as a power play. During this stage of growth, children naturally become more independent and



photo: Wavebreak Media

want some space. Their peers are becoming more important influences, and they start testing all sorts of parental limits. (Don't take it personally.)

During this time, it's more important to model the behavior you want your daughter to adopt. That means not only limiting your own screen time, but being respectful when discussing responsible use of the family's tablet. Listen to your daughter's concerns and perspective while helping her map out a way to build more varied activities throughout the day. For guidance, see "Connecting With Your Preteen" by The Nemours Foundation at kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/preteen.html.

With that in mind, here are some recommendations based on the pediatric academy's guidelines:

- Monitor what media your kids look at, including websites and social media.
- Avoid allowing Internet-connected devices and TVs in kids' bedrooms.
- Watch television and movies with your children and teens, and when appropriate, use the storylines to discuss your family's values.
- Invite your children to draft an electronics use plan. They will appreciate that invitation and may be more likely to follow the plan. Include in your plan cell phones, tablets and other media devices, and possibly a ban on using them at mealtime and bedtime.

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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Joseph Maiorano, family and consumer sciences educator with Ohio State University Extension.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.

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