

# TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME FOR PARENTS & KIDS?

by Dahlia Pease, MD

Having nonstop access to electronic devices is the norm these days.

Parents and kids are spending too much time on these devices rather than spending time with each other.

I see parents talking on their phones as they drive their kids to school. They pause their conversation long enough to say goodbye as the kids exit the car. At work, I see parents and/or the kids on their phones in the waiting rooms and then in the exam rooms. At after school events, kids are playing on phones while waiting for their sibling's practice or game to be over. At home, kids are watching TV or playing video games to pass the time. Teens are texting or on other social media sites, and bringing their phones to the dinner table.

Kids and parents are averaging seven hours a day of screen time on various devices. Excess screen time is leading to problems such as obesity, attention and/or behavior problems, as well as sleep or eating disorders. In addition, it is leading to addictive like behaviors and cyberbullying has become as common as bullying.

This article is not meant to be accusatory. Rather, it is meant to help us take a step back and become more aware of the important moments we are missing with our kids.

## Some ideas on what you can do to help reduce screen time:

- **Encourage face to face interactions.** Spend more time talking with your kids when you are with them. Put the phone away, on vibrate, or out of sight when you get home for the evening.
- **Encourage creativity and hobbies.** Show your kids the phone is not more important than reading a book, playing a game, or helping with homework. Engage them in hobbies such as cooking, painting or puzzles.
- **Lead by example.** Don't run to your phone every time it rings or buzzes. Explain to



your kids that the nice thing about text messaging is that you can respond when the time is appropriate for you.

- **Encourage just being kids.** At events, don't just offer your phones to keep the kids out of trouble. Bring some toys or books so they can play and interact with the other siblings that are waiting around too.
- **Prevent Obesity.** Put a limit on screen time every day, no more than one to two hours. Even better, avoid screen time during the week and save it for a limited time during the weekend. Encourage screen free activities such as playing outside, dancing, or exercising as a family.
- **Avoid sleep and behavior problems.** Encourage screen free areas in the house. Avoid TV's, computer and cell phones in bedrooms. Do not allow video games or cell phone usage before bed as it is too stimulating and can cause trouble falling asleep. Don't just leave the TV on as background noise, turn on some music instead.
- **Have family meals.** Don't allow TV or phones during meal times. Sit together as a family and talk to each other.
- **Be here now.** No need to take pictures and post to facebook while you are at an event with your child. Take your picture and put

the phone down. Enjoy the memory with your child.

- **Encourage safe phone/media usage.** Make sure you know all the passwords for your children's Internet accounts. Check text messages. Make sure you know who they are texting and engaging with on social media networks. Discuss safe usage of photos and texts. Make sure they are comfortable talking to you about things they see or discuss online.
- **Set an example for safe driving.** Don't talk or text while driving. Focus on driving. Pull over if you need to use your phone. Your teen will be driving soon. Have them witness safe driving tips from you.

Enjoy your kids now, as they grow up quickly.



*Dr. Dahlia Pease is a board certified pediatrician and a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. She received her undergraduate degree from Douglass College at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ and her medical degree from the University of Health Sciences in Kansas City, MO. She completed her residency at the Children's Hospital of Illinois through the University of Illinois in Peoria, IL. She is very active with her husband and their 3 sons. She currently practices at Elliot Pediatrics at Windham, 5 Industrial Drive, Windham, NH. She is currently accepting new patients and can be reached 603-685-0150.*