



# NAVIGATOR'S NOOK

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## Do you have concerns about device use & screen time?

We entered the digital age without any understanding of the impact it would have on our children and youth. Of all the concerns I field with parents and educators, screen time is at the top of the list. The rapid increase in the use and availability of technology means that we have found ourselves playing catchup about how to best support our children manage device use. Pandemic restrictions have made things more challenging.



While technology provides us with incredible advantages and unbelievable ways to communicate across the globe, it has its pitfalls. Cell phones absorb our attentional resources and therefore disrupt cognitive capacity just by being in the room with us. At the same time, because of their allure, we have convinced ourselves that we can't be more than a few feet away from our cell phones at any given time. What makes this more concerning is that research shows that the more screen time an individual engages, the greater the likelihood of negative impact on mental health. On top of that, studies indicate that too much screen time can harm the developing brain.

How do we contend with devices in the classroom? While there may be benefits (tracking assignments, photographing homework boards and researching for projects) cell phones in classrooms are a significant distraction for any student. In addition, cell phones have the potential to disrupt and erode connection and relationship with others. These devices steal opportunities for friendship and real time connection which is critical nourishment for the developing brain. While they may have perks, devices do not replace human connection which is so vital to learning. In fact, cell phones create such a distraction that concentration and therefore learning become almost impossible.

I'd like to share a success story in the district where the classroom community along with families worked together to reimagine how technology impacts the learning environment. Some of the challenges faced included work output, focus and dis-regulated behaviour. After examining potential causes for disruption to learning in the classroom, the learning community collectively decided to adopt a device-free policy. Since mid-February students arrive and put their devices in "the phone hotel" where they are left with the exception of the lunch break. Two months later, the team report a significant improvement in the learning environment for all members of the classroom community. Students feel more connected, more productive and the classroom culture is thriving.

This classroom experience parallels what families also achieve when they adopt device use policies at home. Parents often fear pushback, but once they get the plan in place they are surprised to discover that their kids seem to appreciate parent-imposed boundaries around device use. All of us need a break from the constant bombardment of images, information and social demands that devices lay on us – kids are no exception, but they often lack the cognitive and emotional resources to set limits for themselves. Many parents and caregivers report that problematic behaviour lessens and they feel more connected to their kids. Digital detox and device use policies are a win win.

How to tell if your child has too much screen time ([www.aboutkidshealth.ca](http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca))

Screen time becomes unhealthy when your child is glued to a screen for most of the day. If your child's screen time falls outside the recommended limits for their age, you may notice some concerning signs. Children and teens who spend too much time in front of a screen may seem:

- lonely
- sad
- overly tired
- stressed or fearful
- isolated from friends or family
- agitated or tense
- aggressive or angry.



They may also have emotional outbursts and have difficulties making and keeping friends. Some children also have difficulties concentrating and lose interest in school or other hobbies. A decrease in physical activity (including the many benefits that come along with this behaviour) may also result from high amounts screen time.

So how much screen time? Honestly, most experts say not much: "None for children under 2; Children aged 2-5 years should have no more than an hour a day; and children aged 5-18 years should have no more than two hours a day. That's a tough call for teenagers, especially with homework often requiring computer time. But the real danger is non-educational, leisure screen time, so you may wish to discount homework screen time.

Dr Larry Rosen, psychology professor at California State University, says that it's more important to limit the stretches of time children spend in front of screens rather than worry about the total amount each day. Frequent breaks stop the brains from becoming over stimulated and combat screen addiction. Kids need to switch off without stress. Rosen suggests a limit of 40 minutes then an hour's break for under 10s. For older pre-teens that should be a maximum of an hour, then an hour off. For teenagers it should be a maximum of an hour and a half. Remember to give kids a five-minute warning before their allotted time is up.

For further information and ideas for tackling screen time at home visit the Canadian Pediatric Society Website: <https://cps.ca> and enter "screen time" into the search bar.