Screen Time - Advice for Parents

Making Screen Time Work for Your Child's Language Development

What is 'screen time?'

In our modern world, screens are everywhere. 'Screen time' refers to time spent looking at a screen. Screens come in many shapes and sizes:

- Smart Phones

- TV

- Tablets

- Laptops or PCs

How much screen time is recommended for my child?

Advice from the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that children less than two years old are not exposed to screen time. Screen time for children over the age of two is recommended to be for one hour or less.

For children aged 5 to 18, it is recommended that parents place consistent limits on the use of any media, that includes watching television, using screen based games or using the Internet.

A limited amount of child-friendly screen time can be educational but it is very important to make sure that the content is appropriate for your child's age group.

Why limit screen time?

o Real life experiences and interaction with those around them are the best ways for children to learn.

o There is evidence that babies and toddlers have difficulty transferring new learning from screen to real life and they are unlikely to learn language from screens at this early age.

o Learning in the early years is more effective when children experience interactions in real life with real people.

What are the potential risks of too much screen time?

o Too much screen time limits the time for real life learning and interactions between you and your child.

o Watching a lot of TV at an early age has been linked to attention and concentration difficulties later in childhood.

o Having TV on in the background can disrupt a very young child's play.

o Too much screen time can negatively impact sleep for both children and adults.

o Exposure to background TV has been found to have negative effects on language learning.
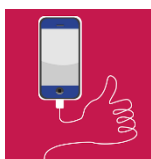
Top Tips for Positive Screen Time

Nowadays it is unrealistic to expect that children will not be exposed to screens. When used in moderation, screen time can be a positive learning experience.

• Ensure that programmes or games contain age appropriate content for your child and avoid anything aimed at adult audiences e.g. soaps, music channels etc

• Where possible, try to watch or use screens together. You can:

o Link what you are watching with real life.

o Build on language skills e.g. highlight new vocabulary, comment on what the characters are doing.

- You can use your screen time to:

  - Encourage conversation.

  - Develop understanding of 'wh' questions e.g. 'who were they talking to in the bakery in what we watched?' 'why did they do that?', 'where did they go?'

  This can be done while you are watching something together or afterwards.

- If your child is slightly older, choose your viewing or your screen activity with them and watch it together.

- Provide a good example for your child and try to limit your own use of screens e.g. turn the television off if no-one is watching, put your phone away during meals or family time.

- If you are using screens for games, ensure that you are with your child, actively engaging with them and talking about what is happening on the screen.