

Most parents would like to avoid having their kids spend the entire summer watching television or playing video games—but it's not easy.

“Screens” are everywhere including television screens, computer monitors, and even the handheld devices used for checking email, listening to music, watching TV, and playing video games on the go.

On average, preschool children spend over four and a half hours a day consuming screen media. The typical eight-to 18-year-old spends nearly four hours watching TV or videos, more than an hour on the computer and 50 minutes playing video games. That amounts to nearly six hours a day in front of a screen.

Excessive screen time is linked to a number of problems for children, including childhood obesity, poor school performance, and problems with attention span.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that screen time for kids should be limited to one or two hours a day and no screen time for children under the age of two. Reducing the amount of time spent in front of a computer or TV can boost health and happiness, prompting families to engage in more physical activity and get creative in finding other ways to spend their time.

Here are a few tips to reduce children's time in front of the screen:

- Take the TV out of a child's bedroom. More than two-thirds of young children have a TV in their bedroom. This can isolate family members and decrease interaction. Also, children who have TVs in their room tend to spend almost one and-a-half hours more in a typical day watching TV than their peers without a set in their room. It is much easier to never put a television in a child's room than it is to remove one that's already there.
- Make meal time, family time. Turn off media during family meal time and take the TV out of the kitchen. Family meals are a good time to talk to each other. Research has shown that families who eat together tend to eat more nutritious meals than families who eat separately. Make eating together a priority and schedule family meals at least two to three times a week.
- Provide other options and alternatives. Rather than relying on screen time for entertainment, help a child find other things to do. Consider alternate activities such as riding bikes, playing a sport, learning a hobby or trying a new board game. Have a child make a list of all the fun activities they could do this summer that don't involve a screen.
- Set a good example. Be a good role model and also limit screen time. If kids see an adult following your own rules, then they will be more likely to follow. Instead of watching TV or checking email on a phone, use this time to do something fun and active with the family.