

"eSmart Schools has found the content in the Kidproof Safety program to be a valuable and credible resource on cybersafety for schools"

THE DIGITAL DIET: WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO ACHIEVE A HEALTHY MEDIA DIET FOR THEIR CHILD

Managing media is a constant struggle for parents. It feels like a relentless dilemma over how much is too much? Tablets and smartphones are creating a whole new level of challenge for families and it seems as if it is becoming increasingly difficult the smaller the devices get. The family computer in the lounge room is a dinosaur – extinct; and with many households having more individual handheld devices than occupants, it raises the challenge even more!

Parents often feel challenged around screen time decision making. What we need to keep in mind is that it is a parenting issue familiar to so many other areas of our lives. As parents, one of our main tasks is to set limits on many things including bed time, household responsibilities, friends and behaviour. Setting rules and boundaries around media is no different.

Today's generation of 'screenagers' are mass consumers of media. Some studies show youth spend nearly ten hours per day glued to TV's, computers, phones and video games, and they consistently consume several media types at once. They are massive media multitaskers!

The American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP), one of the only established organisations to make recommendations on screen time, discourages screen time for children under age 2 and advises limiting daily screen time

to no more than 2 hours for older children. Statistics such as these can squeeze our parental guilt gland despite our good intentions.

How much screen time is OK for my child?

It depends. What is most important to consider is the quality of the media they are accessing and how it fits into your family's lifestyle. Chances are that if your child is using high-quality age appropriate media and their screen time is balanced with adequate off screen activities, then their behaviour is constructive and there is no need to worry.

Finding the balance is like trying to find the pivot point on a see-saw. Too much weight on one side or the other and we lose our balance. So how do we find the right equilibrium? We can start by asking ourselves a few questions...



Balance

- Is screen use in your house in balance with other activities the family/children do?
- Is it balanced over the day? Over the week?
- Are we enforcing bedtime 'curfews' on electronic devices?
- Have we accounted for all the devices (tablets, smartphones, computers, games and TV) in the home?

Today's "screenagers" are massive media multitaskers—our challenge is to help them find the balance.

Our Workshops

CyberSafe Early Years
CyberSafe
Social Netiquette
At Home Alone
Stranger Smarts
Bully Proofing
A Girls Way
Conflict Resolution
Babysitters Training Program

Balance is top of mind when thinking about media diet

Quality

- Does it have learning potential?
- Is the game, show or app age appropriate?
- Is the source of the content credible?
- Is it helping to build problem solving skills, encourage creativity or develop motor skills?

Engagement

- Does it foster a relationship with a friend, family member or social group?
- Is it helping to expand your social world in an important way?
- Are there other ways to engage or connect?
- Have we designated bedrooms as 'screen free' zones?
- Am I staying involved in my child's media habits through co-viewing?
- Do we have a family charging station where all devices are expected to be overnight?

Create a digital diet that works for your family

It is worth creating a schedule that works for your family. You might like to consider weekly screen time limits. Perhaps think of media use in terms of minutes per day rather than hours per day. What kind of screens they can use (gaming systems, smartphones, tablets, laptops). What types of activities or programs are acceptable and which ones are not?

It is important to do this step as a family. Getting the children involved and having

input into the plan gives them a vested interest and they are more likely to be willing participants who stick to the rules. This also helps teach children about media literacy and self-regulation.

Consider your own media diet

At some point in the last decade we have transitioned from a culture that uses technology to one that is completely absorbed by it. As parents we are the best role models for our children, and many parents seem to be consumed by the swelling flood of gadgets and websites. If you find yourself answering texts at the dinner table or unable to tear yourself away from the latest update on your social network, then you might need to consider a digital diet yourself. It is about being present in the moment – the moments that matter.



As a parent myself I find that balance is a top of mind concern when thinking about my children's media diet. By starting to look at balance, quality and engagement - you have a great foundation when you find yourself questioning the media balance in the family. It is a launching point into some discussions and an opportunity to look at alternative activities.

