

How Much Media Is Too Much?

by Kathy Slattengren

When parents discuss how much media they allow their children, the answers vary wildly. Some parents have very strict time restrictions on their children's media viewing while others give their children more control over the time they spend on media.

How do you know when your child is getting too much media?

One mom knew she needed to allow less video game time when her 7-year-old son started not wanting play outside or do things with the family preferring his video game instead. He was so attached to playing his video game that he often pitched a fit when he was told the game had to go off. His games didn't have a good way to save the game for later so he was reluctant to stop playing and lose his place in the game.

She decided to reduce his video game playing to one hour twice a week. She started giving him a 10 minute warning before his hour was up. When the 10 minutes were up, he could either choose to shut the game off or she would turn the power off. It only took a couple times of turning the power off to get him to shut the game down in time.



What are signs that digital usage is becoming a problem?

If your children are exhibiting these types of behaviors, it's time to think about reducing the time they spend on media:

- Spending less and less time with family and friends
- Difficulty focusing on the present moment due to craving video game or cellphone
- Developing health issues such as Carpel Tunnel Syndrome, eye strain, weight gain, backaches
- Withdrawing from sports, hobbies and social interactions
- Losing sleep due to gaming, texting
- Acting irritable or discontent when not using digital items
- Declining grades in school, missing school
- Talking and thinking obsessively about the digital activity
- Denying or minimizing any negative consequences

If you feel your child is addicted to video games and will react extremely to having limits set, it is wise to seek help from a professional counselor or psychologist.

What do the experts recommend?

Hilarie Cash, psychotherapist and co-author of [Video Games & Your Kids](#), makes the following recommendations for personal screen time (computer, TV, video games). This time does not include computer time needed for homework.

- Under 2-years-old: no screen time
- Preschool: 1 - 2 hours/day

- Elementary: 2 hours/day
- Junior/Senior High: 2 - 3 hours/day

She also recommends no TV, internet or gaming consoles in children's rooms. The primary problem with having these devices in children's bedrooms is that parents have more difficulty monitoring what's going on.

Won't it be difficult to set limits?

It can be very hard to set limits around digital entertainment. These digital devices keep our children content while we benefit from some free time. However, when we realize our children's media usage is having a negative impact on them, we need to set some limits despite our children's protesting.

With older children, it can help to explain why we're concerned about the time they're spending on digital entertainment. Engaging them in deciding what reasonable limits should be set may help them in sticking to those limits.

We may also need to change our own behavior so that we are modeling reasonable digital media usage. While this won't be easy, it will provide the time to try other activities. Perhaps this will be the summer your family discovers how much fun it is to go biking together!

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