

## Limiting Screen Time for Kids This Summer

by Kathy Slattengren

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Do you feel your kids are spending too much time watching TV, playing video games and being on the computer? Do ever find it challenging to get them to turn off the TV or computer and go outside to play? If so, join the crowd!

### How much time are kids really spending with media?

The Kaiser Family Foundation released a report in January 2010 showing the average amount of time kids 8 - 18 are spending with media. These are the numbers for a typical day:

- TV (4 hours, 29 minutes)
- Music/audio (2 hours, 31 minutes)
- Computer (1 hour, 29 minutes)
- Video Games (1 hour, 13 minutes)
- Print (38 minutes)
- Movies (25 minutes)



This adds up to 10 hours and 45 minutes of media exposure. When using more than one media concurrently is taken into account, the media time is 7 hours and 38 minutes.

Wow! Our kids are averaging over 7 hours a day on TV, computer and video games. That doesn't leave much time for playing outside! Where did they learn to spend so much time watching TV and playing on the computer?

It seems our kids may be picking this behavior up from us! A 2009 study of adults media usage by Ball State University's Center for Media Design and Sequent Partners reported that "In addition to the revelation that consumers in the 45-54 age group average the most daily screen time (just over 9 1/2 hours), the Video Consumer Mapping study found the average for all other age groups to be strikingly similar at roughly 8 1/2 hours." TV accounted for the majority of that time.

### Why should we be concerned with limiting screen time?

Parents are bringing a lot of concerns to me about how media is affecting their children. One mom complained that her 8-year-old son was having meltdowns whenever it was time to shut off his video games. A dad discussed the negative attitude he was seeing from his daughters - something he believes they are picking up from watching TV. Another couple shared that their daughter was more interested in playing with her Nintendo DS while on vacation than going outside to play on the beach with her cousins.

Preschool teachers are linking the aggressive behavior they see in their classrooms to what the children are watching on TV. Children act out the violence they've seen.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics' Policy Statement "Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the messages conveyed through television, which influence their perceptions and behaviors. Many younger children cannot discriminate between what they see and what is real.

Research has shown primary negative health effects on violence and aggressive behavior; sexuality; academic performance; body concept and self-image; nutrition, dieting, and obesity; and substance use and abuse patterns."

### **How much screen time is reasonable?**

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children 2 years old and younger be exposed to no screen time. For older children, the AAP suggests limiting screen time -- including TV, video games and computer use -- to one to two hours a day of active viewing time.

How do these recommendations compare with the amount of daily screen time your children typically have? Most parents will find that their children are far above these recommendations. Being aware of the problem is the first step in making some improvements.

### **What are ways to limit media usage?**

If your children are old enough to discuss the issue, sit down as a family to talk about it. State your concerns and brainstorm ideas on how your family could limit media usage.

These are some ideas other families have used:

- Declare a "screen free day" once a week where nobody watches TV, uses the computer or plays video games.
- Install monitoring software on computers that allow parents to set time limits.
- Track daily media usage and stop using media after the allotted time is up.
- Set timers to go off after a media time limit has been reached.
- Turn off the TV during meals.
- Move TVs and computers out of bedrooms and into common areas.
- Plan more activities to do together like bike rides and hikes.

Researchers have found that children whose parents make an effort to limit media use spend less time with media than their peers. Although your children may resist your efforts to reduce their screen time, the long term benefits are worth it!

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