# Limit Screen Time

**Young children who spend a lot of time watching TV or playing video and computer games are less likely to be physically active in later childhood.** They are also likely to eat foods that are less healthy, such as soft drinks and fried foods as well as more snacks, and may be more likely to become overweight. In many child care settings, children spend 1 to 3 hours watching TV each day. You can make a difference by limiting or eliminating screen time and providing children with other fun activities.

## How much total screen time*should children be allowed every day, both at child care and at home?

▶ **No screen time (TV/video/DVD)** for children under the age of 2.

▶ **No more than 1 to 2 hours per day** of high-quality programming for children over the age of 2.

**\* Screen time includes TV and DVD viewing, video games, recreational computer use, internet surfing, and other electronic devices.**

## How much screen time should children be allowed while in child care?

Since many children get too much screen time at home, it's important that they are not exposed to very much screen time while in your care.

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|---|---|
| **Children under the age of 2** | No screen time, including TV/video/DVD viewing or computer use. |
| **Children over 2 years old** | Only 30 minutes total of screen time per week. |
| | No more than 15-minute increments of computer use. |
| **All Ages** | No screen time during meals or snack time. |

## Special Notes:

- Parents and families should be informed if screen media are used in child care programs.

- Screen time should only be for educational or physical activity programs.

- All screen time should have no commercials or advertising.

# Why do we need to limit screen time use?

Limiting screen time can help children maintain a healthy weight as they grow. Screen time can take away from activities that help brain development, imagination, and social skills, such as talking, playing, singing, and reading.
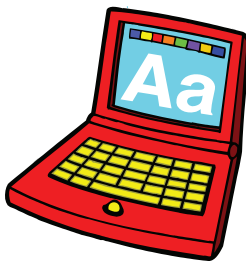
▶ **It is important to limit TV and DVD time because:**

- Having the TV on can disturb children's sleep and play, even if it is on in the background.

- TV and some DVDs include advertisements for unhealthy foods. Young children cannot tell the difference between programs and advertisements.

▶ **It is important to limit video game\* playing because:**

\* **Video games include those played using a video game console and a TV, a hand-held device such as a cell phone, or a computer.**

- The more time children spend playing video games, the more likely they are to have difficulty concentrating in school.

- Many video games contain violence.

- We know from research that, at least for boys, the more time they spend playing video games and watching TV, the less active they are.

- Even video games requiring children to be active while playing the game (called exergames) should be limited. Children might not reach a high level of physical activity when playing these games.

▶ **It is important to limit recreational computer use, even for educational games, because:**

- Many Web sites promote less healthy foods.

- Many Web sites include on-screen computer or video games.

- Computer games can impair children's sleep at night, possibly causing them to spend less time in deep sleep. Sleep is important for children's health and development.

**TIP:** **Limit screen time by removing the TV or other equipment from the areas where children spend time, or keep it out of sight by covering it with a cloth.** This keeps children from expecting screen time and helps them focus on developing relationships and social skills while they learn.

# Activities

## How can I put this information into practice in my child care program?

Replace screen time with creative activities children can do on their own while you are accomplishing other tasks.

**Which of these fun ideas will you try next week? Mark your choices.**

☐ **Play music:** Have children make up their own dances. Add wide ribbons and beach balls for more movement.

☐ **Provide toys for children to stack:** Nesting cups or building blocks can be fun for young children.

☐ **Organize puzzle time:** Have easy puzzles children can do alone or in pairs.

☐ **Draw, color, create a sculpture, or use play dough:** Choose a topic of the day and have children draw or create the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the topic. Do easy craft projects, such as coloring or making greeting cards for upcoming holidays or birthdays.

☐ **Provide a sack of special activities:** Put together a bag or box containing activities that children don't normally do. This will keep the children busy during times you need to do other tasks.

☐ **Other ideas:** _____

Practice good role modeling. Participate in activities with them. Limit cell phone and computer use when children are busy with other activities.

**Which of these creative activity ideas will you try with children next week? Mark your choices.**

☐ **Conduct a "pretend play" activity:** Cut out shapes in a variety of colors. Have children make a pretend place that each shape represents. Travel from place to place by putting the shapes in various spots both indoors and outdoors.

☐ **Read:** Read books and point to pictures. Have children make up their own stories. Children can take imaginary journeys to different places, such as the jungle, ocean, or moon.

☐ **Encourage extra outdoor play:** Set up a safe obstacle course for children to balance, climb, jump, and hop. Visit *http://www.headstartbodystart.org* for additional ideas for outdoor play and active play using pool noodles, beach balls, and hula hoops.

☐ **Act out stories or skits:** Hand out a variety of costume pieces and have children dress up.

☐ **Involve children in part of the meal and snack preparation,** as well as clean-up time.

☐ **Encourage children to be active:** Do not allow hand-held video games during active play times.

☐ **See the Active Play tip sheets** on pages 63 and 67 for more ideas.

☐ **Other ideas:** _____

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# My Notes: