



# MANAGING SCREEN TIME FOR CHILDREN

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**S**creen time - it's one of those tricky topics to deal with from day to day. There are such mixed messages in the media about how much screen time is appropriate, healthy or even just OK for children to have.

Screen time has some valid and handy functions for both children and adults, so let's not have all the thumbs down against

screen time. The key is to have our eyes open, have clear minds and be open to how society seems to be pulled along and sucked into more and more screen time. It's time to take stock and think clearly about WHY we should bother to think about this issue for children. It's time to look up from our screens and really take an honest look about how much screen time our children are consuming every day.

## **SEVEN REASONS WHY WE SHOULD BOTH MANAGING SCREEN TIME:**

### **1. Life is busy and screens are a time waster.**

Have you ever drifted into Facebook, Pinterest, eBay land, then taken a look at the time and realised 5, 12, 20 minutes has disappeared? Life is busy, and we are fritting away so much time being distracted by our screens. It's the same for our children. Time seems to run away.

### **2. Social disconnection threatens our families.**

We can be on the couch swapping attention between our hand held screens and the TV for hours and not connect with our family in the same room. We can enter the house after work or school and not have any fights or disagreements, but also no relationship building conversations. Both of these can lead to social disconnection in our families.

### **3. Time spent on screens is time not being active.**

We are fighting the battle of the bulge and obesity is threatening all ages. It's time to swap your child's screen time for a walk around the block, a swing in the back yard or jump on the trampoline. Give your child's brain some time to rest.

### **4. Contrary to our habits, screen time is not relaxing and stress reducing.**

Zoning out with a screen may feel like relief after the pressures of the day, but if you really want your child to relax and sleep

better, encourage them to take a look outside, watch the sunset, go for a walk on the beach or stare at a fish tank.

### **5. Too much screen time is linked to difficulties in getting to sleep.**

In a study of 10,000 16 to 19 year olds, researchers in Norway found that the longer a young person spent looking at an electronic screen before going to bed, the worse quality sleep they were likely to have. Having 1-2 screen free hours before bed supports a better sleep.

### **6. Screen time opens up the possibility of on-line bullying by children and particularly by teenagers.**

It's much easier to post negative opinions on social media than to bully someone face to face, but the effects of on-line bullying on children can be just as devastating.

### **7. While children are using screens, it makes communication very frustrating.**

Often adults are frustrated as we can't get the attention of children to ask how their day went or how they are feeling. Are children using screen times as a coping strategy?

Which of the above 7 reasons speaks closest to your heart? Are these risks enough motivation for you to consider encouraging your child to change their screen time habits? Now, what is your child doing? How long have they got until bed time? Is it time for them to disconnect from the screen and connect with you?



*Deb Hopper is passionate about helping children achieve their potential. As a practicing Occupational Therapist at Life Skills 4 Kids in Forster on the NSW Mid North Coast she understands the day to day struggles that children, parents and teachers face.*

*She is passionate about empowering parents and teachers to understand emotional regulation and practical strategies to help*

*children and is often called upon for media comment. Deb draws on over 18 years' experience as an Occupational Therapist working in mental health and paediatrics.*

*Deb is the co-author of the CD Sensory Songs for Tots and author of the soon to be released book **Helping Children Soar in a Post Digital World: Teaching Kids to Stress Less**. For a chapter of her upcoming new book, join her [website](#).*