

Screen Time – a Positive Approach

There is no doubt that the amount of time children spend using screens is increasing. As well as television, many children now have access to phones, tablets, e-readers and games consoles, and professionals and parents alike are voicing their concerns.

The main issue with screen time is that a lot of it tends to be passive. It requires no active participation on the part of the child, and can detach them from communication and interaction with friends and family. In addition, studies are increasingly showing that too much time spent in front of a screen can have a negative impact on sleep patterns, concentration, mental health and physical activity.

There is a tendency to think that all time spent using a screen is bad, but this doesn't necessarily have to be the case. After all, computers and technology are a part of modern life, and it would be unreasonable to expect our children to spend no time in front of a screen – especially given that many parents are also wedded to their phones and devices! But there are ways to make your child's screen interactions more active and positive.

One of the most important things is for parents to actively engage with what their children are doing. Where possible, don't use screens as a babysitter – instead, ask your child what they are doing. If they are using a coding programme, ask them to explain what they are doing and teach you how to do it too. This will also increase their self-esteem as they realise they have a new skill.

If your child is doing some research, sit with them and talk about the questions they want to ask and how to use the information they have found to answer them.

Research useful apps with your child, talking about what kind of things they would like to do and what their needs are.

Here are some more ideas for how to make screen-time more positive:

1 Learn to Code

Coding (or computer programming), is now a part of the curriculum in English schools. Whereas in the past children were only taught to use ready-made computer programmes, such as Word, they are now given opportunities to write programmes themselves. Children can create animations, develop games and programme toys, as well as playing enjoyable programming and debugging games online. There are some really good apps available – ask your child's school what they use.

2 Use Educational Apps

There are many excellent apps out there which help children to learn spellings and times tables in a fun and challenging way. Do some research or ask your child's school what they would recommend.

3 Write a Blog

Writing a blog is an excellent way of developing reading and writing skills. There are child-friendly publishing sites available, or you could ask your child's teacher if their blog can be published on the school's website – they may agree, especially if the blog relates to something that has happened in school, such as a trip, a topic or a special event.

4 Edit Photos

There is photo-editing software, which enables your child to enhance and improve photos they have taken and incorporate them into other, larger projects.

5 Use an E-reader

Many children are happier reading a book on an e-reader than in paper form, and any teacher will tell you that reading is reading, however you are doing it!

6 Use YouTube to Learn

Instead of passively watching cartoons and vloggers, encourage your child to research a new skill on YouTube – anything from learning to knit to baking a cake.

7 Do Some Research

If your child has a new topic at school or a project to complete, encourage them to do some research online. Guide them through the process, talking about the importance of using a variety of sources and avoiding plagiarism. Alternatively, ask a 'big question' such as 'What would happen if the sun suddenly disappeared?' and ask them to research the answer.

The secret to positive screen-time is definitely to increase engagement and reduce passivity, and one of the best ways to do this is to be present with your child whilst they are using their screen. Having said that, there is still a place for passive screen activity – it is a good way to relax and switch off, so don't ban it altogether.

The key is to strike a balance – between active and passive screen time, and also between screen time and other activities or time spent with the family. To do this, you need to set an example in the amount of time you spend on your own devices. You may also wish to set some rules as a family about times when devices are not to be visible – for example, mealtimes.

Most importantly of all, remain vigilant about protecting your child's safety online – this becomes easier if you are engaging with your child as they use their screens. For further advice and guidance, have a look at the [Parents' Guide to e-Safety](#).

