VERMONT Consultation & Psychiatry Access PROGRAM

Supporting Pediatric and Perinatal Providers

CAREGIVERS GUIDE

HEALTHY TECHNOLOGY USE FOR CHILDREN

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Technology can be a positive part of children's lives, offering opportunities for learning, creativity, connection, and entertainment. Caregivers can help children develop healthy technology habits by setting developmentally appropriate limits, staying involved in what children are doing online, and making sure technology does not interfere with sleep, physical activity, family time, or other important experiences.

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS RECOMMENDS:

UNDER 18 MONTHS	**No screen time**
18 - 24 MONTHS	Limited, educational programming consumed with a caregiver
AGES 2-5	Limit of one hour per day of high quality programming
AGES 5+	Make a plan for screen time together with your child. Healthychildren.org offers a free, online template for making a Family Media Plan.

WHAT CAN CAREGIVERS DO?

- **Be a good role model.** Pay attention to your own technology habits and model putting devices away to make time for family, sleep, physical activity, and other offline experiences.
- **Create clear and consistent expectations.** Establish family rules about when, where, and how technology can be used. The American Academy of Pediatrics' Family Media Plan can help families develop expectations that work for them.
- **Protect sleep and family time.** Keep screens from interfering with bedtime and create regular screen-free times, such as during family meals.
- **Keep technology use where you can see it.** Especially for younger children, encourage device use in shared family spaces where caregivers can stay involved and monitor content.
- **Choose developmentally appropriate content.** Consider both your child's age and their individual developmental needs when deciding what games, apps, shows, and other media are appropriate. Common Sense Media offers reviews and information that can help caregivers make these decisions.
- **Watch and play together.** When possible, engage with media alongside your child. Ask questions about what they are watching or playing and help them think critically about what they see.
- **Pay attention to your child's response.** If you notice changes in your child's mood, sleep, behavior, or functioning after using certain media, talk with them about what

you are noticing and consider changing or limiting that content.

THINK ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF SCREEN TIME

Not all screen time is the same. Watching videos, video chatting with a family member, creating something, playing an interactive educational game, and completing schoolwork all serve different purposes.

Rather than focusing only on the number of minutes spent on a screen, consider what your child is doing, what they are getting from it, and what technology might be replacing. Try to make sure children still have plenty of opportunities for sleep, physical activity, imaginative play, reading, family interaction, and in-person connection.

When possible, avoid making technology the primary reward for good behavior or the primary way your child learns to manage boredom or difficult emotions.

TEACH ONLINE SAFETY EARLY

As children begin using connected devices, teach them basic online safety rules:

- Do not share personal or private information online.
- Do not communicate with or make plans to meet people you do not know in real life.
- Be kind and respectful when communicating online.
- Tell a trusted adult if something online makes you feel scared, uncomfortable, confused, or unsafe.
- Tell a trusted adult about cyberbullying or other concerning online behavior.

Keep the conversation going. As children grow, their technology use will change. Regular conversations about your family's expectations, online experiences, and safety can help children develop healthy habits and feel comfortable coming to you when they need help.

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