

Screen time during COVID - what is normal?

Exercises to work on the topic at home or at school

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Screen time during COVID - what is normal?

Lockdowns, the difficulties and impersonal nature of digital education, the reduction in face-to-face encounters, the need to redefine screen time, especially as many aspects of our offline lives have moved online (learning, conversations, programmes, performances, theatre, concerts, etc.).

We can work together to make and stick to rules - this is what a digital contract at home is all about, where family members talk through habits around smart/digital device use, quality time together and sleep, listening to each family member's views and needs.

The WHO recommendation prioritises physical, social and offline activities over screen time for children of all ages. This is important in light of the fact that research shows that obesity is also a growing risk due to the decline in physical activity and the increased use of smart devices.

- The WHO also recommends only 1 hour of screen time between the ages of 3 and 6 and only with parental supervision, but stricter experts say that it is not a problem if a child has little or no contact with smartphones, tablets or computers until the age of 6 or even 10. Of course, parents need to be role models and aware of their own use and of the rules they make and follow at home - that's what the before mentioned digital contract at home is all about. Otherwise, the number of likes, or followers will become a predictor of likeability and worth, not to mention the fact that these numbers should always be increased a little to achieve the same effect - which leads to the end result of manipulation, putting oneself and one's life on the line or 'dramas' that evoke strong emotions. Neither this nor the various forms of online bullying can be handled by a child's developing brain and personality, but if they take the plunge into this world, it will leave its mark.

Proposals

- Between the ages of 0-2 years, children do not need screens for their development, avoid contact with screens, and between the ages of 2-5 years, up to 1 hour of screen time is recommended, but only with parental supervision
- Avoid screens 1-2 hours before bedtime as they can disrupt the body's production of melatonin. In addition, the content consumed can also be stimulating - affecting both sleep time and sleep quality.
- Smart devices and phones should not be brought to the dinner table when sharing a meal, but it is also recommended to keep them out of reach when doing other activities (e.g. outings, board games). This helps to be consciously present and has a positive effect on storing and reliving memories.
- For offline and off-site activities, it is best not to use your smartphone, for example to take photos, as notifications and available apps can easily distract you.
- If we sit in front of a monitor or spend most of our time in front of a computer or laptop because of our work, it is worth exercising every 2 hours, taking care of our fluid intake and how our eyes are coping with the strain.
- It is important to control and limit notifications on social networking sites, which are the main signals of apps. Again, it's about exploiting curiosity, capturing attention, time spent on the page or app and to keep us there longer. It's also the same „trick” when in the chat app we see someone is typing - of course we are curious about what they have to say, it's another matter that an accidental pressed letter or a sentence started, a chat left unfinished can send that false hope. But in the end, we are stuck in front of the screen.

Digital pacifier

The digital pacifier phenomenon applies to young people and adults alike. Smart devices are great as a distraction or in situations where we need a little comfort. They can offer a thousand ways to overcome boredom, reduce anxiety and even vent when something bad has happened to us. A sad, outraged or despondent post may get a flood of supportive messages, likes or hearts, but something is lost. By pushing our emotions aside or immediately 'pouring them out', we don't learn to deal with them, we don't live them and we don't develop the ability to cope with such situations ourselves – this is called emotional incontinence, which raises the problem of whether we are able to cope and control our emotions. If we imagine a world where every emotion has to explode immediately, has to find an immediate channel, we are not only left empty at the end but also helpless. If we have only one tool to turn to when we are in trouble, what happens to us when it is not available? The phenomenon has a name: FOBO (Fear of being offline), the anxiety of being left tool-less in a difficult or boring situation.



Filter bubble effect

The filter bubble effect is personalised information that a searching algorithm presents to us because they think we are interested in that aspect or page. If you type in dangers of video games, vaccine effects or climate change it will add or list the most common searches. This opens up a whole range of contradictory and misleading information in the name of transparency. But in addition, in terms of the ads, posts, promoted pages, FB groups, products, company services we see, we are placed in a bubble where similarity, similar mindsets and viewpoints are prioritised by the program in the content it recommends to us. This puts us in a bubble of familiar information and opinions, which can create narrow-mindedness, prejudice and reduce our empathy, as we find „all” the evidence online that we see things right, think right.



Let's talk to the children about it!

The questions on the next page can help you do this.



Questions that can help to process this section

- What is the filter bubble and confirmation bias? Are there advantages and disadvantages?
- What's it like to get caught up in scrolling through social networking sites and get stuck in front of a screen?
- How much time do you think you should spend in front of a screen in a day? How is it distributed? What does it depend on?
- Have you or anyone else ever experienced spending too much time online? What caused this and what helped to resolve the situation?
- When do you think online and screen time is useful and when does it become dangerous or harmful?

Situational exercises to help controlling screen time

How to get children to use screens responsibly and abstain?

What can families and children do and what tools are available?

The situational exercises on the next page will help answer these questions.



Exercises and techniques for discussion and debate

- Write a fictional digital contract with your family - what would be important to whom? What would cause difficulties?
- Talk about screen time, but form a group of "parents" and a group of "young people" who have to convince each other with arguments.
- Discuss who knows what settings, features or apps help to reduce screen time or awareness.



Task card

Write a fictional digital contract with your family
- what would be important to whom?
What would cause difficulties?

Task card

Talk about screen time,
but form a group of
"parents" and a group of
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Task card

Discuss who knows what settings, features or apps help to reduce screen time or awareness.



Help children to manage the digital bubble!

You can print out a small version of the infographic on the next page and hand it out to your children, or post it on the wall in a larger size to keep it in front of them.





We can be caught in a web of illusions

We can become addicted to content tailored to our infinite tastes

Advantage

It's easier to meet the things that interest us

The bubble can magnify what are actually insignificant problems, causing anxiety, fear, depression

Disadvantages

The bubble effect is personalized information that is thrown up by a searcher because he thinks we are on his projection or page of interest

How to get out of the bubble?

We become less willing to step out of our comfort zone, we can become narrow-minded

Don't consume only the content presented to us by the algorithm. If you can turn the algorithm off, let's try it!

Search and actively explore new topics, new interests, new places. Step out of your comfort zone!

Anchor ourselves in real life. Doing a bit of real-life research can give you an idea of whether some of the online drama or scandals are really relevant or blown out of proportion.



What can we do as parents to reduce screen time?

As parents, we have many opportunities to reduce our children's screen time by setting a good example and making family life rules.

You can print out a small version of the infographic on the next page and hand it out to parents, or post it on the wall in a larger size to keep it in front of you.



