



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/reducing-screen-time>

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Down Time from Screen Time?

K-State's Wiles encourages parents to reduce children's screen time

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – In the United States, screens are everywhere.

Televisions, laptops, tablets, electronic bulletin boards and – of course – cell phones.

“Yet, what we know about positive childhood development,” said K-State Research and Extension child development specialist Bradford Wiles, “is that screens are not very helpful. Often, they are simply a mindless activity that doesn’t grow children’s brains or their social-emotional or physical development.”

Many healthcare authorities and pediatricians – among them the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) – have published guidelines indicating children under age 2 should have no screen time, while everyone else should limit screen time outside of work or school to 1-2 hours per day.

Wiles, who has [authored a K-State Research and Extension publication](#) on the topic, says that there is an “opportunity cost” associated with screen time. “If you’re engaging in screen time, you’re not doing things that can help you with skill building in multiple domains – physical, mental and social.”

Screens, he said, are often substituted for babysitters, or a break for parents or other caregivers to get other tasks done.

“If that’s for a limited time, that’s fine; I understand the need to perform your household duties,” Wiles said. “You’re not harming your child by doing that, but be mindful of how much time is going by and do your very best to make up for that by being intentional in engaging with your children before and after screen time.”

Wiles is careful to indicate that technology, itself, is not the problem. “The problem is when you use that tool to isolate yourself or your children,” he said.

“If that tool is being used for engagement, then great. That is how children of all ages learn...through dialogue, discussion and shared experience. The ability to talk, and learn with and from each other is really a benefit to human development.”

Other things to keep in mind, according to Wiles, include:

Families with very young children

Screen time should be severely limited for those under age 2 – ideally they should have none. Wiles said screen time is not nearly as stimulating as interaction with other humans. Spend time playing with young children instead.

Families with children ages 6-17

Establish “screen free” zones in the home, including bedrooms. It may seem like punishment – and difficult to enforce – but the payoffs are great. If families choose to incorporate more screens into their lives, seek ways to use them in active ways, such as singing or dancing along to a favorite music video.

Family fun

Tablets and smartphones may provide an opportunity for families to play interactive games, such as puzzles. Less-skilled family members learn more by asking questions, receiving instruction and getting feedback.

Whole family screen time

Decide in advance what you will view as a family. Avoid watching TV during meals or leaving the TV on for background noise. In addition, avoid texting or talking on a phone during meals or when outside with your family.

More information on child development [is available online](#) from K-State Research and Extension.

-30-

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
American Academy of Pediatrics (Media and Children), <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/>

The New Screen Time: Beyond Television and into the Future (publication), <https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3248.pdf>

Applied Research in Child Health and Enhancing Resilience, www.hhs.k-state.edu/ahs/extension/child-development

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