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THE DANGERS OF PASSIVE SCREEN TIME: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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TRAINING OBJECTIVES

- What "passive screen time" really means and why it matters.
- How screens can help *and* harm our children's growth.
- Simple strategies for building healthy media habits.
- Ways to use screens for creativity, connection, and learning.
- How to talk with kids about online safety and balance.

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APPROACH: CULTURALLY HUMBLE & FAMILY DRIVEN

- Strength-based: we build on what's working.
- Family-centered: every household is different.
- Nonjudgmental: no shame, no blame.

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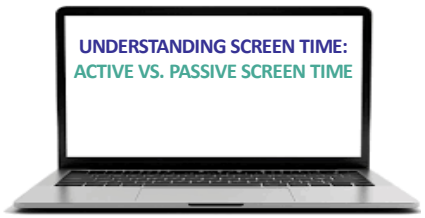
UNDERSTANDING SCREEN TIME:
ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE SCREEN TIME



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SCREEN TIME

Screen time should empower children's growth, not undermine their physical and emotional wellness. With mindful use, it nurtures learning, creativity, and connection.

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CONTENT & CONTEXT

- Quality matters more than quantity.
- Ask what draws your child in and how it affects emotions.
- Balance calm-down media with real-world play and rest.
- Watch for "crowding out" screens replacing sleep, meals, or social time.

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ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE SCREEN TIME

Passive: Watching shows, scrolling, or streaming with little engagement.

Active: Creating, problem-solving, coding, or connecting with others.

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PASSIVE SCREEN TIME

Screen-based activity where there is no active or constructive participation

- **Low cognitive demand:** It requires little to no thought, creativity, or active engagement to progress.
- **Consumption-focused**: The primary mode is absorbing information or entertainment that is served to you, such as watching videos or live streams.
- **Examples:** Watching TV shows or movies, live-streaming services like YouTube, scrolling social media feeds, or playing repetitive games.

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PASSIVE SCREEN TIME

Challenges:

- Easy to lose track of time
- Can increase loneliness, anxiety, or poor sleep
- Often replaces social or physical activity
- May reinforce unrealistic images or comparison thinking

Possible Benefits:

- Helps with relaxation or winding down
- Offers entertainment or distraction during stress
- Can be a shared comfort activity (family movie night)

Source: Mayo Clinic (2024): "Screen Time and Sleep in Children."

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PASSIVE SCREEN TIME

Physical & Mental Health

Social Isolation

Cognitive Development

Unsafe choices & interactions

Reduced Opportunities for Other Activities

Motivation

Creates or Increases attention deficit challenges

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ACTIVE SCREEN TIME

Benefits:

- Encourages creativity and problem-solving
- Builds digital, social, and communication skills
- Can spark curiosity and learning (coding, art, music, research)
- Promotes movement and engagement (exercise videos, games, dance apps)
- Strengthens relationships when used *together*

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ACTIVE SCREEN TIME

Supports growth, connection and emotional wellbeing.

Skill development → Exploration of Interests → Creative Expression → Strengthening of relationships. → Interactive engagement *rather than passive or purely for entertainment.*

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UNDERSTANDING SCREEN TIME: IMPACT ON FAMILY WELLBEING

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WHY THIS MATTERS: FAMILY CONNECTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Screens can teach, connect, and inspire, but too much passive use can crowd out the moments that make us feel close.

When technology becomes a default babysitter, it can quietly erode family time and sleep.

Source: AAP Family Media Use Guidelines (2023).

Image courtesy of: Axios

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QUALITY AND CONTEXT OF SCREEN TIME

The quality and context of screen time can be as important than the number of hours.

Ask: *What is my child doing and how does it make them feel after?*

Prioritize active over passive use.

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POLL 1: DAILY SCREEN TIME USE

Approximately how many hours per day does your child spend on screen (TV, tablet, phone, or gaming device)?

a) Less than 1 hour
b) 1–2 hours
c) 3–4 hours
d) 5 or more hours

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THE FACTS

Kids who use screens to create or learn show better self-regulation.

Co-viewing with parents reduces behavioral problems.

Passive late-night use is linked to fatigue and mood issues.

Sources: AAP 2023; Buzanko 2024; Mayo Clinic 2024.

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POLL 2: SCREEN-FREE ROUTINES AT HOME

Many families use routines to support balance. Which of the following best describes your home? Do you have designated screen-free times?

a) Yes, we have established screen-free routines
b) Sometimes, depending on the day or situation
c) Not at this time
d) We are in the process of developing them

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INTENTIONAL USE = HEALTHIER OUTCOMES

Children who use screens intentionally for connection or learning report higher well-being and focus.

Studies Show: Intentional screen use builds executive function skills and self-awareness.

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GROWING UP DIGITAL: WHAT HEALTHY USE LOOKS LIKE

Ages 5–8: The Early Years

- Keep it **simple and shared;** co-watch, co-play, and talk about what they see.
- Focus on **learning, creativity, and routine**, not endless scrolling.
- Build real-world play and outdoor time into every day.

Pre-Teens (9–12): The Transition Years

- Teach **balance and boundaries,** screens are tools, not toys.
- Encourage creation (videos, art, coding) over passive consumption.
- Start early conversations about **online safety and kindness**.

Teens & Young Adults (13+)

- Screens become **social spaces,** guide, don't just limit.
- Model healthy digital habits and **tech breaks**.
- Talk about **mental health, identity, and comparison culture**.

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FROM LIMITS TO CONNECTIONS: FROM DEVELOPMENTAL AWARENESS TO INTERACTIVE FAMILY STRATEGIES

Image courtesy of Emory University News Center

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THE 5 C'S OF MEDIA USE

- **Child:** Know your child's personality and triggers.
- **Content:** Filter for quality and values.
- **Calm:** Encourage off-screen ways to relax (sleep, movement, breathing).
- **Crowding Out:** Notice what screen time might replace.
- **Communication:** Keep conversations open and curious.

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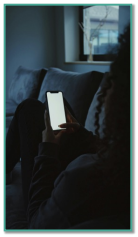
NIGHTTIME SCROLLING: A CLOSER LOOK

Activity: Focus on a familiar situation for many families: A child who scrolls endlessly at night.

Using the 5 C's, we will consider what may be going on and how families can respond in a calm, supportive way.



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5 C's Step	Question	Answer
C1: Child	What might this child be feeling or needing at night?	They may feel anxious, restless, lonely, or need help settling. Scrolling may be their way of calming themselves.
C2: Content	What do you think they are watching at night, and why does not knowing matter?	Often, we do not know what they are scrolling, and that is the concern. Without knowing the content or safety settings, the child may be seeing things that keep them awake or are not safe.
C3: Calm	What could help this child relax if screens were not involved?	Soft light, a simple routine, deep pressure, quiet music, reading, or a short check-in with a caregiver.
C4: Crowding Out	What healthy bedtime habits might be getting pushed aside?	Sleep, winding down, quiet rest, regulation, physical activity or homework.
C5: Communication	How can we talk about this without it becoming a fight?	Start from curiosity. "Help me understand what scrolling does for you at night." Keeps things calm and open.

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REFRAMING THE NARRATIVE: TRANSITIONS FROM FAMILY ACTIVITIES TO POSITIVE REFRAMING AND SAFETY AWARENESS

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MATCH THEIR INTERESTS WITH HEALTHY MEDIA

Explore their passions through positive, age-appropriate content:

Animals: ***Wild Kratts, Nat Geo Kids***

Music: ***GoNoodle, GarageBand***

Building: ***Minecraft Education***

Science: ***NASA Kids Club***

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REFRAMING HOW WE TALK ABOUT SCREEN TIME

Instead of Saying…	Try Saying…
"You're on that thing too much."	"I notice you really enjoy your screen time. Let's figure out how to make sure it fits with sleep, school, and family time."
"Turn that off now!"	"Let's finish what you're doing and take a short break together. How much time do you think you need to wrap up?"
"You're addicted to your phone."	"It seems like your phone helps you stay connected. Let's talk about ways to keep it positive and balanced."

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REFRAMING HOW WE TALK ABOUT SCREEN TIME

Instead of Saying…	Try Saying…
"Stop wasting time online."	"What do you like most about what you're doing online? Maybe we can turn that into something creative or social."
"You never listen when I ask you to log off."	"It's hard to stop doing something you enjoy. How can we make transitions easier like a five-minute warning or a timer?"

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ACTIVITY: INTENTIONAL OR IN-BETWEEN?

Not all screen time is created equal. Let's look at a few examples and see if they feel Active, Passive, or Intentional.

For each example, drop your answer in the chat:
A = Active
P = Passive
I = Intentional

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WHICH ONE IS IT?
TYPE A, P, OR I IN THE CHAT, NO JUDGMENT, JUST REFLECTION!

- Parent and teen watch a documentary about mental health and talk afterward.
- Child scrolls TikTok before bed for an hour.
- Family records a silly dance challenge together.
- Youth joins an online peer group to talk about stress.
- Parent gives child a tablet while waiting at the doctor's office.
- Teen designs a logo for their small business using Canva.

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ONLINE SAFETY

- **Don't click on pop-ups.**
- **Be careful with people online.** Not everyone is who they say they are.
- **Protect personal information.** Never post full names, addresses, phone numbers, or anything private or inappropriate.
- **Discuss sexting and digital permanence.** Once something is shared online, it can be saved, copied, or spread, even if they delete it.

https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/24_0920_k2p_top-10-tips2protect.pdf

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"Our goal isn't to take technology away, it's to make sure it works *for* our kids, not *against* them."
Governor Kathy Hochul, 2024 Press Conference on Youth Wellness

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REFLECTION: STATE ACTIONS ON YOUTH, SCREENS & MENTAL WELLNESS

- **"Bell-to-Bell" Smartphone Limits:**
  Statewide restriction in K-12 schools starting 2025–26 to reduce classroom distractions and improve focus.
- **Social Media Algorithm Regulations:**
  New law limits addictive, algorithm-driven feeds for minors to protect mental health.
- **Wellness Campaigns:**
  "Get Offline, Get Outside" and "Unplug & Play" promote screen balance, family connection, and outdoor activity.

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GAMING AND MENTAL HEALTH: PROBLEM OR POTENTIAL?

- Can build focus, teamwork, and stress relief.
- The issue is balance and content, not the controller itself.
- For many youth, gaming is a **social lifeline**, especially for those who struggle face-to-face.
- Watch for red flags: loss of sleep, irritability, social withdrawal, or falling grades.
- Encourage co-play, breaks, and boundaries, not shame.

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NEURODIVERSITY & SCREEN TIME

- For autistic and ADHD youth, screens can be both a **comfort zone** and a **communication bridge**.
- Predictable, visual environments reduce anxiety and sensory overload.
- But hyperfocus and dopamine-seeking can make time management harder.
- Use visuals, timers, and transitions instead of punishment.
- Support **self-regulation**, not screen elimination.

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POLL 3: IMPACT OF SCREEN TIME ON MOOD

Children experience screen use differently. Thinking about your child how would you describe the impact of screen time on their mood and Behavior?

a) Mostly positive, it supports regulation, engagement, or learning
b) Mostly negative, it tends to increase stress, irritability, or dysregulation
c) A combination of both
d) Unsure or it varies significantly

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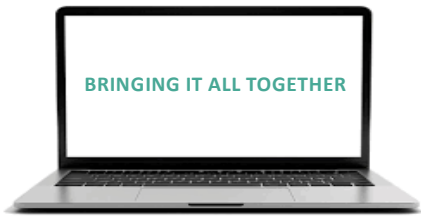
BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER



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REFLECTING ON YOUR CHILD'S MEDIA USE

Children are different, and so are their risks and benefits with media. Ask yourself;

- **Who is my child, and what draws them to certain content?**
- **Does media support a strength or talent, or add stress or anxiety?**
- **Is their online world positive and supportive, or overwhelming?**

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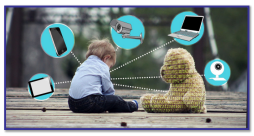
THE ALGORITHM: WHAT YOU CLICK IS WHAT YOU GET

Algorithms learn from your child's habits and then feed them more of the same.

- Positive, educational clicks = more positive, educational content.
- Doom-scrolling = more doom-scrolling.



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SOCIAL MEDIA: ISN'T GOOD OR BAD

Benefits:

- Can help youth build community, express themselves, and feel included
- Open doors to creativity, advocacy, and learning new skills
- Real-time support and connection during tough moments

Challenges:

- Can expose youth to cyberbullying, predators, spam accounts, and privacy risks
- Fuels comparison culture, anxiety, and feeling "always on"
- Uses addictive design, spreads misinformation, and reduces face-to-face time

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CYBERBULLYING & ONLINE PREDATOR SAFETY

Spot the Red Flags
- Mood / behavior change after online activity.
- Secretive phone use or deleted messages.
- New friends you do not recognize.
- Avoiding school or pulling away socially.

Cyberbullying Signs
- Mean comments, rumors, exclusion, impersonation.
- Posts or screenshots shared without consent.
- Group chats turning negative or hostile.
- Pressure to send photos or private information.

Online Safety Awareness
- Fake or overly friendly profiles.
- Targeting youth who feel lonely or want attention.
- Grooming through compliments, secrecy, or gifts.
- Pause and talk to an adult if something feels wrong.
- Encourage youth to speak up early and often.

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CONTENT & CONTEXT

- Quality matters more than quantity.
- Ask what draws your child in and how it affects emotions.
- Balance calm-down media with real-world play and rest.
- Watch for "crowding out" screens replacing sleep, meals, or social time.

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BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER:

- Screen time isn't good or bad, what matters is **how**, **why**, and **when** it's used.
- Aim for more **active** and **intentional** use, and less mindless scrolling.
- Match media to your child's **interests**, **needs**, and **developmental stage**.
- Reframe screen time conversations with curiosity, not conflict.
- Support balance: sleep, school, family time, outdoor play, and tech breaks.
- Keep talk about online safety **open, honest, and ongoing**.
- Most importantly, use media to **connect with your child**, not disconnect.

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We Appreciate Your Feedback!

https://forms.office.com/r/yfRzusMKRP

Until Next Time!

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Thank You for joining us today, we look forward to seeing you at our upcoming sessions and continuing to learn, grow, and support families together.

Thank You

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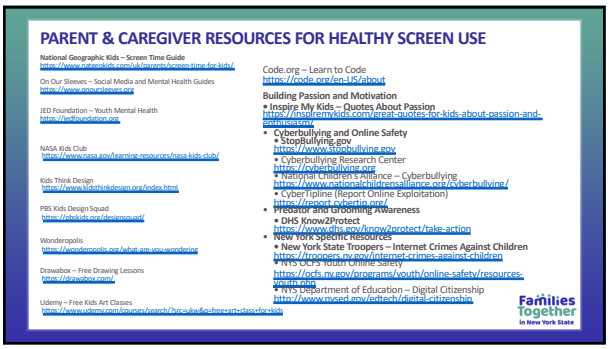
PARENT & CAREGIVER RESOURCES FOR HEALTHY SCREEN USE
National Geographic Kids – Screen Time Guide
https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/screen-time-for-kids/
On Our Sleeves – Social Media and Mental Health Guides
https://www.onoursleeves.org
JED Foundation – Youth Mental Health
https://jedfoundation.org
NASA Kids Club
https://www.nasa.gov/learning-resources/nasa-kids-club/
Kids Think Design
https://www.kidsthinkdesign.org/index.html
PBS Kids Design Squad
https://pbskids.org/designsquad/
Wonderopolis
https://wonderopolis.org/what-are-you-wondering
Drawabox – Free Drawing Lessons
https://drawabox.com/
Udemy – Free Kids Art Classes
https://www.udemy.com/courses/search/?price=price&q=free+art+class+for+kids
Code.org – Learn to Code
https://code.org/en-US/about
Building Passion and Motivation
• Inspire My Kids – Quotes About Passion
https://inspiremykids.com/great-quotes-for-kids-about-passion-and-enthusiasm/
• Cyberbullying and Online Safety
• StopBullying.gov
https://www.stopbullying.gov
• Cyberbullying Research Center
https://cyberbullying.org
• National Children's Alliance – Cyberbullying
https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/cyberbullying/
• CyberTipline (Report Online Exploitation)
https://report.cybertip.org/
• Predator and Grooming Awareness
• DHS Know2Protect
https://www.dhs.gov/know2protect/take-action
• New York Specific Resources
• New York State Troopers – Internet Crimes Against Children
https://troopers.ny.gov/internet-crimes-against-children
• NYS OCFS Youth Online Safety
https://ocfs.ny.gov/programs/youth/online-safety/resources-youth.php
• NYS Department of Education – Digital Citizenship
http://www.nysed.gov/edtech/digital-citizenship
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