



GUIDELINES FOR SCREEN TIME IN CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS



Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics Group
Pakistan Pediatric Association (DBP-PPA)

National Guidelines for Screen Time in Children and Adolescents

Objective

These guidelines give recommendations for screen time usage in children and adolescents in Pakistan.

Screen Time

Screen time is the time spent on any screen including TV, mobile phone, tablet, gaming console, computer, and iPad for any purpose.¹

Excessive Screen Time

Screen time more than age-appropriate limit is defined as excessive screen time.

Screen Time Usage around the Globe

The worldwide increased availability of technology has increased the likelihood of exposure to screen media of young children, potentially affecting their development. Literature in Pakistan showed that average screen time in Pakistan is 3 to 7 hours in early developmental ages (15 months to 36 months).² Chinese children have been exposed to media devices at an early age with the mean time of 1-3 hours per day of screen time while in India screen time of 0.1 to 5 hours per day is reported.^{3,4} Data from European countries showed that children aged 2–6 years old had an average screen time of about 1.5 to 7 hours per day.^{5,6} The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) reported average daily screen time of over 2 hours per day in children above 8 years of age. About 25% of teenagers were found to be constant users of the internet and approximately 75% of adolescents owned a smartphone. Social media sites, mainly Facebook, X (Twitter), Netflix, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram were being used by most of the teenagers. Boys were more keen video game players and due to that 80% boys households owned a device to play video games.⁷

Impact of Screen Time

Excessive screen time at 1 and 2 years of age is associated with poor developmental outcomes later.⁸ It can lead to symptoms mimicking Autism, ADHD and learning difficulties. Screen media usage can cause speech delay, sleep issues, behavioral issues, anxiety, depression and mood instability. Postural issues, obesity, eye fatigue, visual problems and headache are also reported.

Social media platforms may expose children to violence, cyberbullying and risk-taking behaviors.

International Guidelines

Screen time recommendations and guidelines have been developed by various pediatric societies as well as by World Health Organization.^{9,10} American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued guidelines on screen time in 2001 updating them in 2013 and 2016.^{7,11} Screen time guidelines made by Canadian Pediatric Society in 2017 were modified in November 2022.¹² Australia and India made their guidelines on screen media usage in 2021. These guidelines provide age-based recommendations for children regarding usage of screen media. Recently, WHO has advocated no sedentary screen time for infants and restricted screen exposure of less than 1 hour/day at 2-5 years old.¹⁰

Pakistan National Guidelines

- < 2 years: No screen time except video chatting for less than half hour at one time in the presence of a parent or care giver
- 2-5 years: Limit use of screen time to less than 1 hour per day of high-quality programs under supervision with 20 to 30 minutes at one time
- 6-10 years: Less than 2 hours per day of non-violent, recreational content under the supervision of an adult including up to 30 minutes to one hour for educational activities
- 11 years and 15 years: Screen time should be tailored on an individual basis but no more than 2 hours per day. Educational usage should be as per school advice
- 16 years and above: Screen time should be self-regulated with parents. It is important that screen usage does not interfere with studies, sleep and physical activities

Role of Parents/Care givers

- Restrict and supervise usage of screen media
- Get well acquainted with the use of social media and online social content viewing platforms
- Encourage children to develop non screen related skills and hobbies such as painting, sports etc.

- Avoid using screen as pacifiers or babysitters
- Keep talking to the children to learn about their interests
- Assess the individual maturity of every child before giving them a personal device (not before 12 years)
- Child's personal device should have a parental email account logged in for supervision
- No TV in bedrooms
- No screen uses at or just before bedtime or during mealtimes
- Effective family media plan to ensure appropriate usage of screen in the presence of each other
- Adults should model healthy screen usage by engaging in non-screen activities with children like reading, outdoor play, board games, and crafts etc.

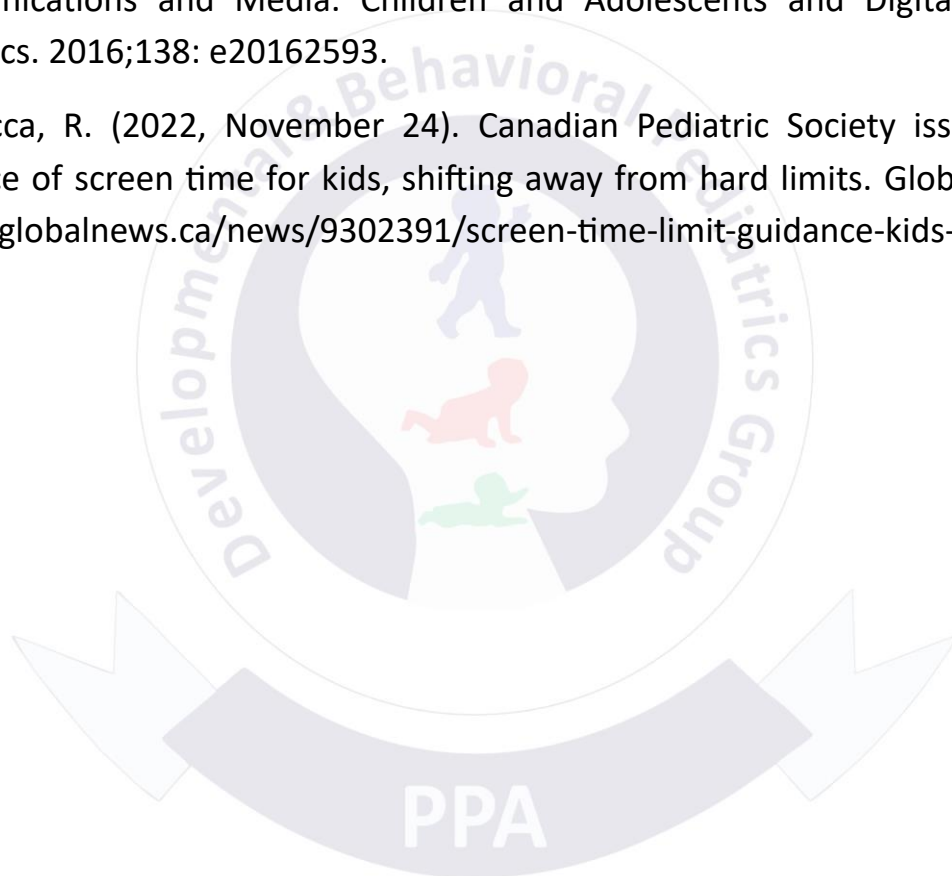
Role of Schools

- School policy should encourage use of interactive learning as a mode of teaching in addition to digital media-based assignments and homework
- Establish clear school policy to prevent children from bringing digital devices to school
- Discourage teachers and students regarding use of mobile phone during class timings
- Encourage participation in extracurricular activities
- Teacher need to recognize early signs of screen overuse by attending relevant workshops and seminars
- Advocacy regarding screen media use
- Prevent cyberbullying in children and adolescents by creating more awareness

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