



# Screen time

*Is it all bad?*



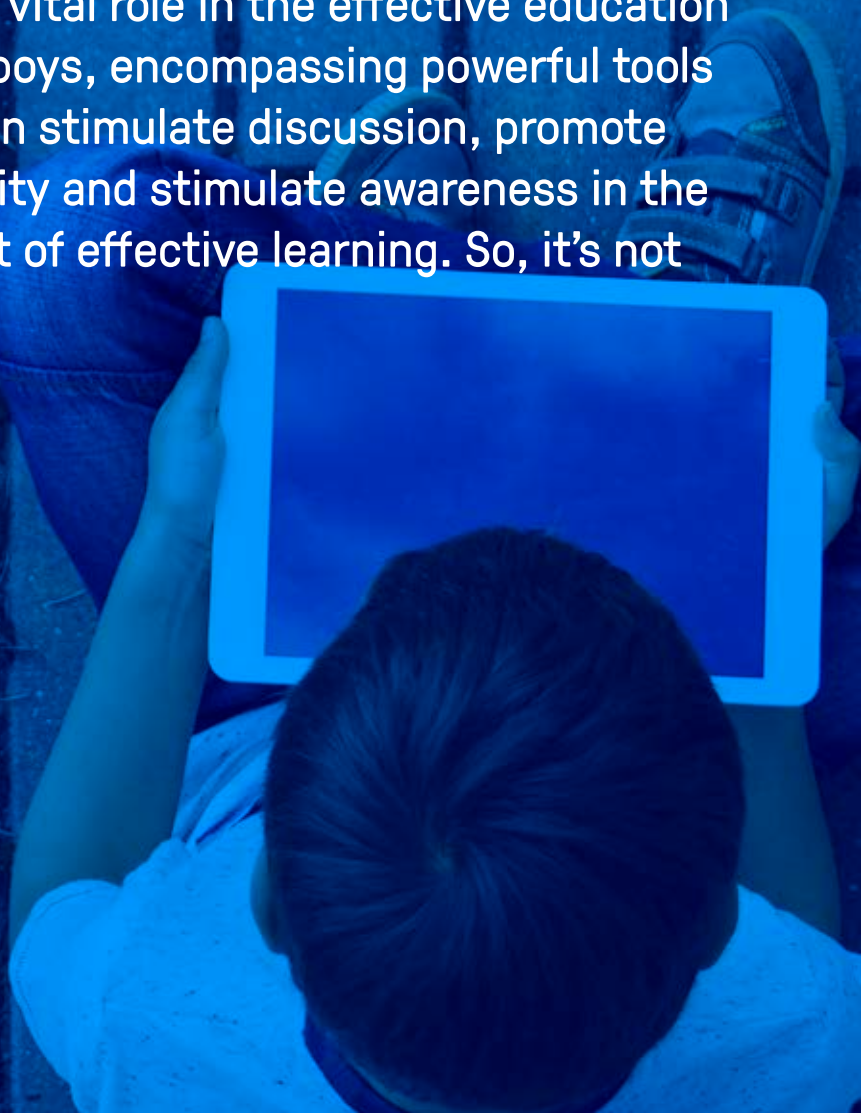
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## Is it all bad?

New technologies have become integral to the lives of children and young people in today's society, both at school and in their lives outside school. At BGS, technology plays a vital role in the effective education of our boys, encompassing powerful tools that can stimulate discussion, promote creativity and stimulate awareness in the context of effective learning. So, it's not all bad.



However, we're all aware that there are possible negative effects of too much 'screen time'. With the ubiquity of smartphones, tablets and other devices, our boys are seemingly attached to their screens 24/7. As adults, we generally know when to cut back on our usage, but children have little or no inclination to switch off. Research is telling us that this may have a potentially harmful effect.

In its *Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Children* (Department of Health 2014), the Australian Government recommends that electronic media use for entertainment purposes be limited to a maximum of 2 hours a day for children aged 5 to 17 years. Numerous studies reveal that Australian children are far exceeding this recommended maximum. In doing so, our boys are at risk of serious physical and mental health consequences. Strong links have been found between the time spent on screens and depression and poor cognitive development.

Studies show that limiting children's recreational screen time to less than two hours a day, alongside supporting them to get sufficient sleep and physical activity, improves cognition and maximises their learning. Research also suggests that the use of screens for school-related activities and assignments doesn't produce the same negative outcomes as recreational screen time.

## What are the experts saying?

**'Screen time and kids: what's happening in our homes?' *Australian Child Health Poll*, Royal Children's Hospital. Report by Dr Anthea Rhodes, Director (7 June 2017)**

- The majority of Australian children are spending at least 3 hours using screen-based devices at home on a typical day, with an average of 4.6 hours on a weekday and 4.5 hours on a weekend day. More than one in five (21%) of teenagers are spending 12 hours or more on screens on a typical weekday and half of all teenagers (49%) reportedly spend 6 or more hours using screen-based devices on a typical weekend day.
- Almost all (94%) of Australian teenagers, two-thirds (67%) of primary school-aged children and over one-third (36%) of pre-schoolers have their own mobile screen-based device.
- According to parents, one in five (19%) of teenagers have experienced online bullying.
- Almost half (43%) of all children regularly use screen-based devices at bedtime and one in four (26%) of these children are reported to have sleep problems related to screen use.

**‘Limiting children’s screen time linked to better cognition’, Alex Therrien, Health Reporter, BBC News (27 September 2018)**

- Children aged eight to 11 who used screens for fun for less than two hours a day performed better in tests of mental ability. Combining this with nine to 11 hours of sleep a night was found to be best for performance. Children who each day had less than two hours of recreational screen time, got nine to 11 hours of sleep, and did at least one hour of physical activity performed better than who did none of these. Less than two hours of screen time a day was the one factor most linked to better performance in the test.

**‘How too much screen time affects kids’ bodies and brains’, Alice G. Walton, Forbes (16 April 2018)**

- Researchers from Cincinnati Children’s Hospital had families rate how much time their kids spent on screens (smartphones, tablets, computers, and TV) and how much time they spent reading actual books. The children’s brains were scanned, to assess how regions involved in language were connected, and it turned out that screen time was linked to poorer connectivity in areas that govern language and cognitive control. Reading, on the other hand, was linked to better connectivity in these regions.
- Researcher Jean Twenge’s work has shown strong links between time spent on screens and depression and suicidality in teens. A recent study of hers reported that teens who spent more time on screens in the form of social media, internet, texting, and gaming thought about suicide a lot more than kids who didn’t. The risks increased for those using electronic devices for 2 hours or more a day, with 33% of adolescents having at least one suicide-related outcome compared with 29% for those spending 1 hour a day. 48% of adolescents who spent 5 or more hours a day on their phones had thought about suicide or made plans for it. Thus, adolescents using devices 5 or more hours a day (compared with 1 hour a day) were 66% more likely to have at least one suicide-related outcome.

**‘Children, adolescents mainly vulnerable to sleep-disrupting effects of screen time’, News Medical Life Sciences (2 November 2017)**

- With their brains, sleep patterns, and eyes still developing, children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the sleep-disrupting effects of screen time, according to a sweeping review of the literature published in the November issue of the journal *Pediatrics*.
- Of more than five dozen studies looking at youths ages 5 to 17 from around the world, 90 percent have found that more screen time is associated with delayed bedtimes, fewer hours of sleep and poorer sleep quality, the authors report.





***‘The impact of screen time on child and adolescent development’, Dr Ursula Froschauer, Counselling Psychologist, Deutsche Internationale Schule Johannesburg (August 2017)***

- Research has repeatedly found a relationship between media violence and aggressive behaviour in children. In addition to the emotional and mental consequences of screen time, there are also physical consequences. Screen time can impair motor development by minimising movement and exercise. Sedentary behaviour also encourages obesity and type 2 diabetes. The overstimulation from screen time can cause sleep disturbances. Furthermore, there is a link between screen time and damaged eyesight.

***‘Is excessive screen time affecting your child’s mental health?’ Southern Phone (28 May 2018)***

- Studies show that kids spend about 2 hours 19 minutes per day (ages 0–8) and 4 hours 36 minutes (ages 8–12) interacting with screens. Other research states that the average is closer to 7 hours of screen time per day and up to 20 hours per week on *Fortnite* alone.
- Studies about “Internet/video game addiction” reveal that immoderate exposure to screens actually changes the physical brain. Incidents of atrophy were observed in areas of the brain that affect executive functioning abilities, like planning, prioritising, or controlling impulses.
- Some studies also show a relationship between the use of social networking sites and symptoms of depression or anxiety in children and adolescents.
- It appears that no matter what the activity, high amounts of leisure screen time are linked to increased incidences of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

***‘Smart phones have robbed kids of their childhood’, Dr Tom Nehmy, news.com.au (11 March 2018)***

- The link between activity levels and mood is clear. Real-world social activity and exercise are a part of maintaining good mental health, while being withdrawn from social activity and exercise can be both a symptom and a cause of problems such as depression. Social media has also allowed kids to compare themselves to an unlimited number of peers and idols who present unrealistic, highly-selective images of their appearance and lifestyles. The end result for teens? Feeling not good enough.
- The survey evidence suggests a few hours use per week was actually associated with higher happiness than no screen time at all, but then happiness tends to decline with greater use.

## What can I do?

**Given the research, we feel that it is important to promote limited recreational screen time and prioritise healthy sleep routines, and physical and social activity for our boys.**

Interaction with devices and technology is part of a teenager's life and we can't prevent it – nor do we want to. But as a parent, you can set guidelines to limit your son's screen time to a reasonable amount. Here are some practical strategies that you can employ at home to help set boundaries and support your son's wellbeing in the long-term:

- Have a conversation with your son about his screen time. What is he using screen time for? Could he be using it for more beneficial purposes?
- Check in with your son regularly about his wellbeing. Could any changes in his wellbeing be attributed to his use of screen time? If so, does he have any ideas on how to change this? How could he implement these changes effectively?
- Encourage face-to-face social activities rather than digital socialisation.
- Model good device behaviour for your son (e.g. limit your own digital usage at home, don't bring your phone to the meal table).
- Educate your son about appropriate digital usage habits, prioritising other activities and self-managing his screen time.
- Limit time spent on devices each night (e.g. no screen time after dinner or a time you deem reasonable).
- Avoid smartphone use at night and avoid use in the bedroom (phones in bedrooms have been shown to contribute to poor sleep habits).
- Encourage your son to take regular breaks when using his devices.
- If necessary and after discussing this with your son, install applications on his devices that allow you to control or monitor his usage.

Brighton Grammar School  
90 Outer Crescent  
Brighton VIC 3186 Australia

t 03 8591 2202

w [www.brightongrammar.vic.edu.au](http://www.brightongrammar.vic.edu.au)