31st March 2020

Dear Parents,

**Internet Safety Guidance for Parents**

These are unprecedented times for all of us – we are all facing new ways of working and huge change to our daily routines. Inevitably, due to lock down and remote learning, children will be spending more time than usual on their devices. This will potentially add more stress and worry for parents, onto an already stressful situation. Therefore I wanted to send the attached article which outlines some of the findings from a report ([click here for full report](https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/health-impacts-screen-time-guide-clinicians-parents)) into screen time by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) as well as some guidance on how you can optimise time spent online. If you have any further questions or concerns, please email school and we will try and support you remotely. Teachers will look to provide e-safety activities each half term in the home learning activities and packs.

**Full Parent Zone Article (and further guidance)** – Click [Here](https://parentzone.org.uk/article/5-things-parents-should-know-about-screen-time?utm_source=Mailing%208%20Jan&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=PZ%20screen%20time%20article)

“Parents are still getting mixed messages about how much is ‘too much’ when it comes to screen time. You may be concerned about the strict guidelines from the World Health Organisation recommending zero screen time for children under two – Don’t worry – here’s how to take a reasonable, flexible approach – and get your kids on board too.

Conflicting reports on what amount of screen time is right for a child can be confusing for parents. A [recent report](https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/health-impacts-screen-time-guide-clinicians-parents) into screen time from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) found no compelling evidence that screen time is harmful, whereas the [World Health Organisation](https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/24-04-2019-to-grow-up-healthy-children-need-to-sit-less-and-play-more) is recommending strict limits. The good news is that there are sensible, evidence-based ways to think about screen time limits - and, by getting your kids involved, you can find a solution that really works for your family.

Here’s where to start.

**1. Remember not all screen time is the same**

Not all online activities are equal: doing something creative or learning new skills are both very different from mindless scrolling on social media. Being online might be allowing them to socialise in a positive way - or maybe they’re just doing something that they really, really enjoy. If there are real benefits, then the amount of time they spend doing it becomes important.

You know your child better than anyone: as long as screen time isn't interfering with schoolwork or other activities, and isn’t having a noticeable effect on their mood, then try not to obsess over the numbers -there’s probably no need to panic.

**2. How long should kids spend online per day?**

That said, most parents will want to set some kind of limit. The [‘Goldilocks theory’](http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2017-01-13-%E2%80%98goldilocks-amount-screen-time%E2%80%99-might-be-good-teenagers%E2%80%99-wellbeing) put forward by academics from Oxford and Cardiff universities suggests that a certain level of screen time can be beneficial, helping children develop their creativity and build their communication skills.  Around 1 to 2 hours daily during the week and a bit longer at the weekends is considered ‘just right’ for teens - after that the benefits gradually taper off, and the negative effects increase.

Children under 5 are in a particularly important stage of development. It’s important to ensure children this age are physically active and get good, regular sleep. The World Health Organisation suggests that children under 2 years should have zero screen time while those aged 2-4 should only engage in a maximum of one hour of screen use a day to ensure they are getting enough physical activity. However, these are not unbreakable rules you need rigidly stick to and you need to decide what works best for your family. As the RCPCH’s Dr Max Davie noted: “All children have unique needs… Individual assessment is paramount.” Tailoring the goal of limiting screen time in favour of good exercise and sleep to your circumstances is the realistic and achievable way of approaching this.

**3. Boundaries really do work if you stick to them**

The important thing is to get your child involved in the process so that they understand *why*you're setting limits. Be very clear about your reasons and ask them what they think - getting buy-in at this stage will really help to avoid arguments later on. Remember that teens might need to spend longer online to complete their homework.

Once you’ve agreed on the limits, stick to them! It's always tempting to give up in the face of pester power or teenage sulks, but it will get easier every time you stick to your guns. Honestly.

**4. Look out for signs that screen time is having a negative effect**

Keep an eye on how your child’s screen time may be affecting other areas of their life. If they’re spending time with friends and getting enough sleep and exercise, then it's likely that they already have a healthy balance. Talk to your child about what they’re doing online and get them to think about how it makes them feel when they spend time doing these things. You never know, they may actually agree that staying up late gaming is making them too tired for school the next day, or admit that constant scrolling through social media is starting to affect their self-esteem.

**5. Have quality family screen time together**

Although it is good to set aside time when the family is not using screens - outdoor activities, chats at meal times, day trips at the weekend - this doesn’t mean that you can’t also get involved in using screens together. If you know that your child enjoys playing games online, organise a family gaming night or let them plan something for the whole family to get stuck into. If you take a real interest in what they like to do online - whether it's the influencers that they rate, or the latest downloadable content (DLC) on their go-to game, they're more likely to come to you if something goes wrong, or they make a mistake along the way.

**What are the World Health Organisation Guidelines on screen time for younger children?**

The World Health Organisation’s recommendations on the subject of screen time are that those aged 0-1 years old should have no screen time at all, while those 2-4 years of age should have no more than one hour of screen time, with less time sedentary seen as being better. The WHO’s Dr Juana Willumsen has said that “sedentary time should be made into quality time. Reading a book with your child, for example, can help them develop their language skills.”

If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to email your child’s teacher or myself for further advice and support.

Matthew Lee

Head Teacher