

10 TIPS FOR HEALTHY GAME PLAY

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1. Aim for your children to have a healthy media diet in the 3 key areas:

- Moderate amount (1-2 hours per day recreational screen use);
- Content (less of the violent/anti-social/discriminatory media; more pro-social and educational media; more active games);
- Remember, you know more about content even if your child knows more about playing the games.
- Age-appropriateness, especially for children under 8.

2. Keep video games (on any device) out of the bedroom

- This will usually help to lessen the amount of use and moderate the type of use.

3. Aim for more physical activity time than sitting screen time

- This isn't easy, but in an ideal world parents would be creating lots of fun opportunities each day for activity, this can include replacing sedentary e-games with active e-games but should also include more real-world activity than e-based activity.

4. When playing video games, have an active break after 30 minutes

- This minimises prolonged sitting and sustained close-vision effects and helps to switch to other activity.

5. Encourage a good safe playing technique. That is a technique that:

- Avoids poor postures;
- Avoids repetitive movements;
- Ensures sufficient space for active e-games.

6. Know what games your children are playing and monitor their game use.

- In a recent study increased parental monitoring of screen use was associated with reductions in screen time, violent media exposure, aggressive behaviour and BMI, and increases in hours of sleep, pro-social behaviour and school performance.

7. Set and enforce rules around use.

- This may include time quotas (e.g, maximum 2 hours per day of entertainment media, averaged across the week) and content restrictions.

8. Model appropriate screen use and participation in real world activities

- Children copy their parents, so modelling healthy screen use is crucial;
- Children are more likely to be active if their parents are. In Canada, programs that replaced screen time with family time were met with initial resistance by kids, but after 6 months or so family members came to prefer family time.

9. Have a screen-free time before bedtime.

- Sleep professionals recommend 2 hours because the effect of screens with blue light interferes with sleep hormones.
- The closer the screen the greater the interruption to sleep.

10. Be actively involved in your child's game play

- This is especially important if games frighten kids, depict violent or anti-social behaviour or upset kids in other ways. It is ideal to have a parent nearby to put video game content into context and/or to help calm kids/teens if needed
- Co-playing games can be helpful, but to be beneficial the parent should be actively communicating with the child during play.