



Sample Newsletter #4 - Screen time

Less screen time for more fun time!

Dear parents,

This week in the Healthy Beginnings 2-5 program your child has been learning about screen time. Screen time is any time that is spent in front of a TV, computer, video game, etc. The latest Canadian data indicates that children who watch more than one hours of screen time per day have double the incidence of being overweight or obese when compared to children who watch less than one hour per day.

Screen time takes the place of essential physical activity. Help minimize screen time for your child:

- Educate your preschooler and limit screen time to less than one hour per day and keep children physically active.
- Children should not be allowed to watch TV before two years of age and there should be no TV in the children's bedroom, no matter what the child's age.

Tips to reduce screen time:

Talk to your family

Explain to your kids that it's important to sit less and move more in order to be healthy. Tell them they'll also have more energy, and it will help them develop and/or gain new skills, such as riding a bike or shooting hoops, that could lead to more fun with friends. Tell them you'll do the same.

Set a good example

You need to be a good role model and limit your screen time to no more than two hours per day, too. If your kids see you following your own rules, then they'll be more likely to do the same.

Log screen time versus active time

Start tracking how much time your family spends in front of a screen, including activities such as TV and DVD watching, playing video games, and using the computer for something other than school or work. Then take a look at how much physical activity they get. That way you'll get a sense of what changes need to be made.

Make screen time, active time

When you do spend time in front of the screen, do something active. Stretch, do yoga and/or lift weights. Or, challenge the family to see who can do the most push-ups, jumping jacks or leg lifts during TV commercial breaks.



Set screen time limits

Create a house rule that limits screen time to no more than one hour daily. More importantly, **enforce** the rule.

Create Screen-free Bedrooms

Don't put a TV or computer in your child's bedroom. Children who have TVs in their room tend to watch about one and a half more hours of TV a day than those that don't. Plus, it keeps them in their room instead of spending time with the rest of the family.

Make meal time, family time

Turn off the TV during meals. Better yet, remove the TV from the eating area if you have one there. Family meals are a good time to talk to each other. Make eating together a priority and schedule family meals at least two to three times a week.

Don't use TV time as reward or punishment

Practices like this make TV seem even more important to children.

Get active instead!

Watching TV can become a habit, making it easy to forget what else is out there. Give your kids ideas and/or alternatives, such as playing outside, getting a new hobby or learning a sport. Get outside and play as a family!

Adapted from: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/reduce-screen-time/tips-to-reduce-screen-time.htm

Here are some ideas for the whole family to take part in together rather than watching TV:

- Go on a walk or hike – pack a picnic dinner with some bottles of water and head out to explore local trails, beaches, parks, etc. This will get the whole family outdoors, spending time together and being active.
- Sign up for recreation activities in the evening, after school and work. Spend an evening or two at swimming, skating or sport lessons. Community centres often provide many programs at the same time – parents can drop children off that their class then spend some time in the gym for themselves.
- Make physical activities easy to access by setting up a badminton net, basketball hoop or soccer/hockey nets in the backyard. Having play equipment that is easily accessed increases the chances of use. Play games together as a family.
- When it is snowing, kids can head outside with parents to help shovel the snow. Shovel the snow into a big pile and use it to create a snow fort together. This will increase the whole family's cardiovascular fitness, plus you get to have fun playing and being creative together
- Be active with friends. Make plans with family friends to spend time together being active or trying something new. This builds in an obligation component to your active time because other people are depending on you as well. Go to the park together; take a family craft or cooking class. This also helps build social skills for your little ones, plus, you get some adult conversation as well!