



Helping communities value children

A SCREEN-SMART GUIDE FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

IN RECOGNITION OF SCREEN-FREE WEEK



APRIL 29 - MAY 5, 2013

***A CAMPAIGN PROMOTED REGIONALLY BY THE EARLY YEARS INSTITUTE
HOSTED NATIONALLY BY THE CAMPAIGN FOR A COMMERCIAL-FREE CHILDHOOD***

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Introduction



While technology is a very useful and increasingly important part of our lives, the amount of time that children spend with technology has become a national concern. There is no question that advances in technology have allowed machines to enhance learning and development for older children and adults. As schools increase the deployment of technology as a teaching tool, it is our collective responsibility to limit children's use of entertainment-based technology at home.

The Early Years Institute (EYI) is working in partnership with schools, early childhood programs, libraries, pediatricians, and parents to raise awareness about the need for balance between technology and old-fashioned play as the key to a child's healthy growth and development. Our efforts are concentrated during Screen-Free Week, a national campaign to encourage Americans to turn off their televisions, computers, and video games for seven days and explore other ways to enjoy family time together. The message is to be "screen smart," by remembering there is a life away from screens.

This Resource Guide is designed to offer schools the rationale and strategies for promoting Screen-Free Week during the annual campaign and to develop screen-smart policies that last throughout the year. In all endeavors, we recommend administrators use Screen-Free Week as a way to engage teachers, parents, PTA, children and the community in a discussion about what helps children succeed. The goal is to encourage educators, families and children to be mindful of how much time is spent on screen-based entertainment media and to learn how to be screen smart by balancing time with screens and time spent in activities that are more conducive to creative play, problem-solving, critical thinking and active play outside.

Turn this...



Into this!



THE EXTENT OF SCREENS IN CHILDREN'S LIVES

- Children spend more time using screen media than any other activity other than sleep. By the time today's children are 30 years old, they will have spent 10 years of their lives watching TV.¹
- Children ages 8-18 spend over seven hours a day consumed by screens – an increase of 2.5 hours in the past decade.² And, multi-taskers use, on average, 10 hours and 45 minutes of screen media each day.³
- American children ages 2-6 spend an average of four hours per day being entertained passively by screens.
- The American Pediatrics Association recommends that children under age 2 watch NO television. Currently, over a third (36%) of American children under age 2 have TV's in their bedrooms.
- Children between the ages of 2 and 11 see more than 25,000 commercials each year. Children under 8 cannot distinguish between commercials and program content nor understand advertising's persuasive intent.
- The \$17 billion that companies spend annually marketing to children, (an increase from the \$100 million in 1983) are mostly for cereals, candy and fast food.



THE IMPACT OF EXCESSIVE SCREEN TIME

Time spent with screens is associated with childhood obesity, sleep disturbances, and attention span issues.

- **Poorer Health:** The more time children spend watching TV, the more unhealthy foods they eat.⁴ Children also sleep less due to scary images they see before going to bed.
- **Less School Achievement:** By the time children turn 10, each additional hour of TV they watched as toddlers is associated with lower math and school achievement and reduced physical activity.⁵
- **Less Literacy:** E-books add sounds and movements, but they may lower comprehension and hinder emergent literacy.⁶
- **More Emotional Problems:** School-age children who watch more than two hours of daily screen time are more likely to have psychological problems such as hyperactivity and difficulty with peers.⁷
- **More Aggression:** Exposure to media violence is linked to aggression, desensitization to violence, a lack of empathy for victims and poor school performance.⁸



¹ Young, J. (2007). Remote Control: Children, Media Consumption and the Changing American Family. Media Education Foundation Study Guide, MA, p. 1.

² Rideout, V. Foehr, U. & Roberts, D. (2010). Generation M2: Media in the lives of 8-18 year olds. Kaiser Family Fund, CA, p 1.

³ Ibid, p. 2.

⁴ Tavaras, E.M., Sandora, T.J., Shih, M.C., Ross-Degnan, D., Goldmann, D.A. & Gillman, M.W. (2006). The association of television and video viewing with fast food intake by preschool-age children. *Obesity*, 14, pp. 2034-2041.

⁵ Pagani, L., Fitzpatrick, C., Barnett, T.A. & Dubow, E. (2010). Prospective associations between early childhood television exposure and academic, psychosocial, and physical well-being by middle childhood. *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, 164(5), pp. 425-431.

⁶ De Jong, M.T. & Bus, A. G. (2002). Quality of book-reading matters for emergent readers: An experiment with the same book in regular or electronic format. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(1), pp. 145-155.

⁷ Page, A.S., Cooper, A. R., Griew, P. & Jago, R. (2010). Children's screen viewing is related to psychological difficulties irrespective of physical activity. *Pediatrics*, 126(5), pp. 1011-1017.

⁸ Haugland S. W. & Wright, J.L. (1997). *Young children and technology: A world of discovery*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

HOW YOU CAN PROMOTE SCREEN-FREE WEEK

The subject of screens is unique in that it clearly influences both in-school and at-home children's learning. Bring together parents, teachers and administrators to discuss the use of technology at school and home. This can lead to three types of strategies for addressing screen use:

1. **Help children to be more aware of screen use and the benefits of other activities.**
2. **Increase awareness among parents and promote Screen-Free Week to families.**
3. **Develop school policies on the use of screens and technology.**

1. Help children to be more aware of screen use and the benefits of other activities.

- **Create Screen-Free Week Books** where children draw pictures of something they like to do that is screen free. Younger children dictate stories about their pictures. Older ones write their own stories. The pictures and stories are put into a book, either to be read by the teacher or children, as age appropriate.
- **Children write reports on screen-free activities** that they've enjoyed with their families, e.g. a game they played together or a place they all visited, such as a park. Visit www.pickapark.org to find one of 700 parks on Long Island by zip code or playground.
- **Children create posters** showing something they like to do that is screen-free. Posters are displayed throughout the school building or community.
- **Discuss the impact of TV ads with children.** Explain how marketers get children to want what is advertised on the programs they watch. This could include introducing children to the "language of persuasion," ways that ads get viewers to want to buy the products they feature. Teachers could explore the *Media Literacy Project*, at www.nmmlp.org/nmedialiteracy/languagepersuasion, for some key phrases to guide the discussions.
- **Read and discuss relevant books**, such as:
 - *Fix It*, by David McPhail (Family of bears has a TV that breaks)
 - *Blackout*, by John Rocco (how children and families spend time when the lights go out)
 - *Gilberto & The Wind*, by Marie Hall, et al., (outdoor imaginative play)
 - *What If There Was No Color Green?*, by Angela de Caprariis-Salerno and Harriet Carotenuto available through The Early Years Institute at www.eyi.org/greenbook
 - Shel Silverstein's poem, "Jimmy Jet and His TV Set."
- **Play Bradley Rymer's song:** "Instead of Watching MY TV."



2. Promote Screen-Free Week to families

- **Send home a note or newsletter** about your participation in Screen-Free Week inviting parents to join. Distribute Screen-Free Week materials provided by The Early Years Institute – Kids and Screens Fact Sheet, Parenting Tips, Pledge Sheet, etc. Encourage families to take the **Screen Smart Audit** that will help them assess how much media is used by family members each week.

- **Encourage families to sign-up and Take the Pledge.** Parents are asked to reduce the amount of time children spend with screens and to Be Screen Smart in their homes. They can sign up on line: www.eyi.org/screenfree or return a completed form to their child’s teacher for submission to EYI via fax or mail.
- **Encourage families to enjoy meal times without screens.**
- **Ask the PTA to organize alternative activities** during Screen-Free Week. See EYI’s website for some ideas – www.eyi.org/screenfree – Alternative Activities. Several schools have offered a “Pajama Night” when children come to school in the evening in pajamas and they play board games, listen to a story time reading or hear music and go right home to bed.

3. Develop school policies on the use of screens and technology

Develop a school policy on screen use clarifying if, when, and how different types of technology should be used by teachers and children in school. The following list is a starting point for possible policy components:

- **Use of Computers:** They should be used only to enhance curriculum. Children use computers as supplements to hands-on experiences in writing, drawing and exploring concepts through age-appropriate programs.
- **Smartboards** should actively engage children and not be used only for lecture.
- **DVDs:** As an alternative to watching movies during rainy days and when teachers are grading papers, classrooms should be equipped with a variety of board games and other indoor activities for children.
- **Cell Phones:** Children and teachers should not use cell phones during school hours.
- **Electronic books:** Children should use e-books for reading only and not for playing games in school.
- **Rewards** should not involve screens, e.g. sending home a DVD to the winner of the Spelling Bee.

A NOTE ABOUT PRE-K CHILDREN

Keep in mind that young children are active learners. Their learning occurs through purposeful play that is essential for children’s health and well-being. Creative play promotes intellectual growth, critical thinking, constructive problem solving skills, and helps children develop self-control. Children need at least 60 minutes of active and vigorous play each day. One of easiest and most enjoyable ways to meet this goal is for children to have opportunities to play outside.

“Intentional planning promotes rich learning experiences that invite participation, involve multiple contexts, and engage the senses that help children explore their environments.”

NYS Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core

RESOURCES:

- The Early Years Institute - www.eyi.org/screenfree
 Campaign for Commercial Free Childhood - www.screenfree.org
 Common Sense Media - www.common sense media.org



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



This guide was prepared by Marlene Selig, M.S. in Ed., Chair Port Washington Child Care Partnership, Dana Friedman, Ed.D., President of The Early Years Institute (EYI) and Toni A. Riedel, Director of Communications at EYI, with contributions from the EYI Regional Screen-Free Week Committee and the Port Washington Child Care Partnership.

We offer special gratitude to Chris Shields, Principal of South Salem Elementary School in Port Washington, for pioneering efforts in his school to develop policies that are mindful of screen time usage, which have been captured in this Guide.

We are also grateful to CA Technologies for their sponsorship of EYI's Screen-Free Week which enabled us to publish this Guide.



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www.eyi.org/screenfree