
The Effects of Screen Time and Social Media on Children's Development & Mental Health

Dr. Cheryl Gilbert MacLeod, Phd. R. Psych

THE FAMILY PSYCHOLOGY PLACE

Definitions

(courtesy of
MediaSmarts):

Screen time: the time spent with any screen, including TV, computers, gaming, mobile devices (smartphones, tablets)

Digital media: all content transmitted over the internet or computer networks, on all devices

Digital media literacy: the ability to critically, effectively, and responsibly access, use, understand and engage with media of all kinds

What is different today versus back when...

Family structure

Farther away from
family members

Safety concerns
which has led to
changing parenting
practices

Activities /
Schedules

Schools are more
varied (locations,
options)

Technology

What children can be exposed to when accessing screens and digital media:

Content not suitable for their age

- Violence
- Sexual content
- Bullying
- Advertisements

Unrealistic expectations

- Body image
- Challenges that “seem fun” but are dangerous

Messages that are not fact based

- Untruths about medical or mental health
- “fake news”
- Conspiracies or information that is not factual

Consequences of Excessive Screen Time:

Screens can impact language acquisition, cognitive development and social-emotional health in babies and toddlers

Changing levels of physical activity, sedentary behaviour, myopia, motor skills, and lower manual dexterity across childhood

Associated with fewer minutes of sleep per night due to aroused response to screen viewing, melatonin suppression, and sleep displacement

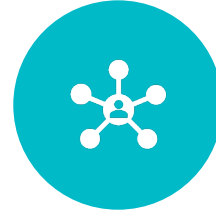
Consequences continued:

Association between screen time and attention difficulties is mixed, but suggests early exposure may have an affect

The routine use of devices to distract or calm can preclude self-soothing strategies and lead to overdependence on screens for emotional regulation

Social Media:

Why are our children drawn to it and what are the consequences?



RELY ON SOCIAL MEDIA AS PRIMARY MEANS OF SOCIAL CONNECTION RATHER THAN IN-PERSON CONNECTIONS



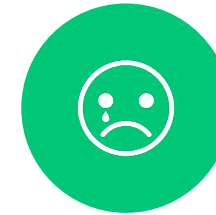
KIDS SEE A SNAPSHOT (OFTEN UNREALISTIC) OF SOMEONE ELSE'S EXPERIENCE



POSTS LACK CONTEXT, SO THEY MAKE UP A BACK STORY



SOCIAL MEDIA LACKS SUBTLE VERBAL MESSAGING AND BODY LANGUAGE



CAN LEAD TO PEER HARASSMENT, INCREASED STRESS, ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, BODY IMAGE CONCERNS AND FEELINGS OF LONELINESS

Things that are good about screens:

Interactive video-chats and virtual story times, singing along with songs, playing games together can be a positive

Well designed, age appropriate content with specific educational goals can help with language, literacy and play.

Some recent evidence suggest that educational game apps can foster sustained attention in children 3 – 4 years

When children watch education, age-appropriate content with an engaged adult, screen time can be a positive learning experience

Positives continued...

Quality content can enhance social skills

Can provide opportunities for interaction that promotes executive functioning via memory, planning and self-control

Can help during medical procedures by distracting from the scary emotions

Can make a long wait easier

If used correctly, can promote physical health (exergaming, using a smart speaker to count to 10 while you are playing hide and seek, scavenger hunts)

What we as parents / caregivers can do:



Duration of use (how much is too much?)

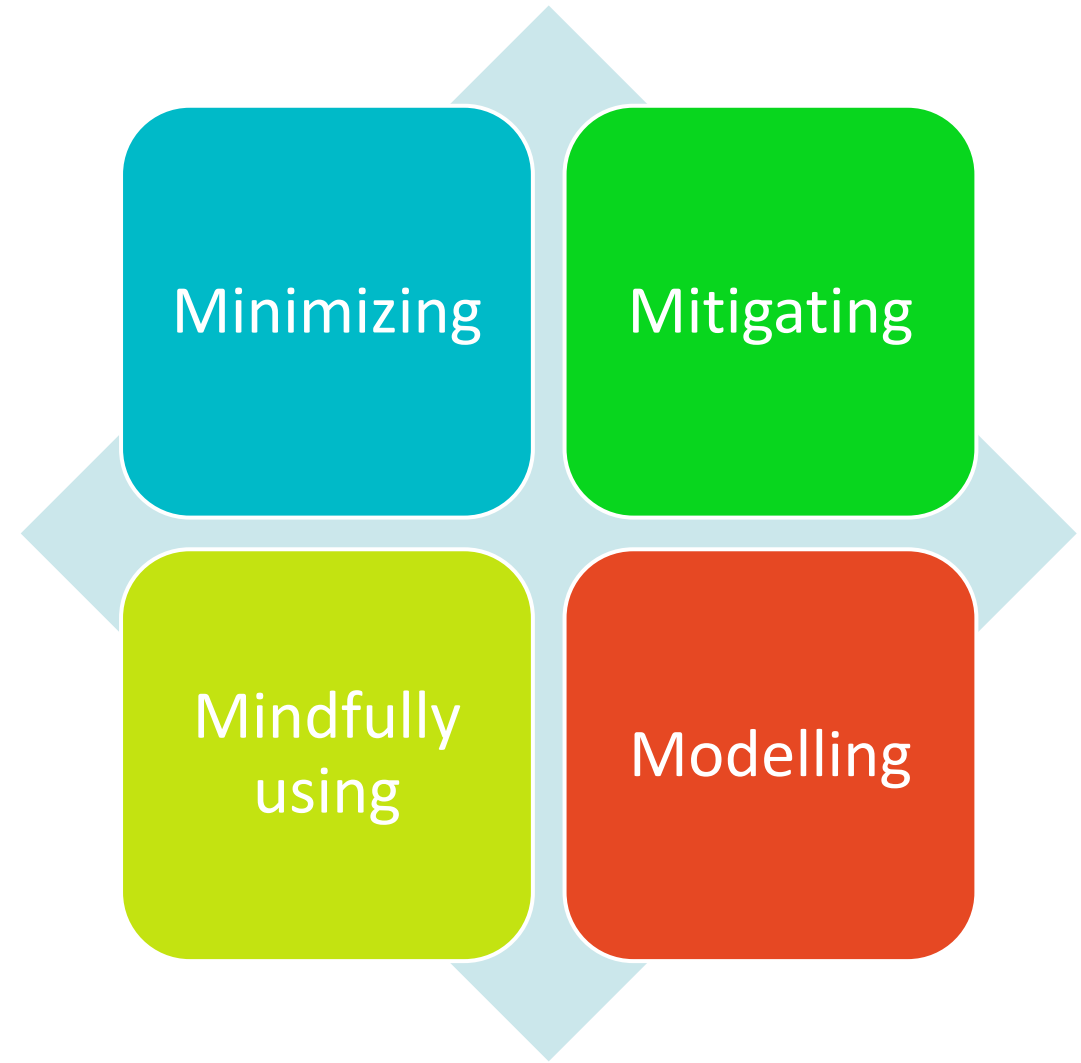


Quality content



Evaluating our own use –
strong association between
parents' screen time and
that of their children

**It is here to stay....
We need to help our
children develop
responsible digital
citizenship**



Questions

