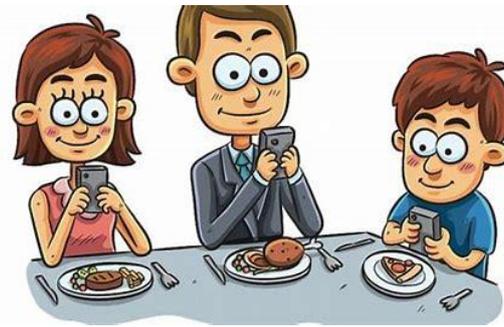


Screen time What we as parent's model



There's a lot of scary information out there about how much screen time a child should have—that too many hours staring at a phone or tablet triggers children's stress responses, stunts their social development and more. But what about adults? With so many of us tied to technology for our entire work day, and then using it to live our lives outside of work, is it even possible to limit? Should we bother?

Yes, experts believe, though they're largely hesitant to give a standardized number of hours we should be spending staring at a screen. Because of a lot of us use these tools for work, limiting can be difficult. But, if you're like most people there's a lot of room for cutting back: The average adult spends close to 11 hours looking at a screen per day and checks their phone every 10 minutes.

When you're not at work, be mindful of how much time you're spending on your phone or other screens. According to a study by Braun Research Centre and Bank of America, we're more likely to think about our phones when we wake up than about our significant others. Another study showed 80 percent of smartphone users check their phones before they brush their teeth in the morning.

Seven reasons why it's worthwhile for parents themselves to put down those devices:

1. You'll model good screen habits. Parents' own screen habits closely correlate to their children's, and joining in on a fast or new limits with your child helps build mutual respect. This also reinforces the message that a screen fast or limits are not a punishment, but something the whole family is working on to be happier and healthier.
2. You'll be more aware. Screen-time is distracting, and it diminishes how in touch we are with our environment. If doing the fast, you'll be more aware of how your children are doing during the fast and more vigilant about any attempts they make to skirt the ban. If simply cutting back, you're more likely to notice patterns of behaviour that occur with and without the presence of screens.

3. Your executive functioning will be enhanced. Everyone's frontal lobe functions better with less screen-time, so planning and problem-solving will come more easily. You'll also be more creative, which makes family activities and one-on-one time more enjoyable — for you and your child.
4. You'll be much more likely to follow through on what you said you would do. Whether that means actually finishing the fast or eliminating screens during the school week, improved frontal lobe function helps us sustain efforts and be self-disciplined. It builds "grit."
5. You'll be more present and emotionally attuned. Your in-the-moment awareness and sense of emotional connection will be enhanced — and your child will notice. Kids and teens often complain that they feel ignored by device-using parents even when they're in the same room. Indeed, studies show spending time together and healthy attachment to parents helps protect children against technology overuse and addiction.
6. You'll be more rested. Reducing your own levels of hyperarousal will help you sleep more deeply, improve your ability to tolerate frustration, and give you more energy. You'll also be less likely to give in when your child attempts to wear you down or argue about screen limits.
7. You may see fewer tantrums in general. While screen time itself can precipitate tantrums and meltdowns (due to creating a hyperarousal and overstimulated nervous system), a recent study found that high parental device use was associated with more behaviour issues in children. This finding is in line with what we already know about development: that emotional resonance, eye contact, and face-to-face interaction with a parent helps regulate a child's nervous system and eventually helps teach the child how to self-soothe. This benefit seems to be separate from and in addition to all the physiological changes that result in improved behaviour from removal of all that stimulation.

So give it a go Put a few healthy habits in place can help keep you in check. In addition to eating without your phone in hand and taking walks without your headphones on, "don't keep your phone by your bed," "Put it to sleep in a different room and get some things done in the morning without checking it. Turn off all possible notifications."