

*Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4: 8-9*

## Signs that Internet or Game Usage is a Problem and What to Do About It

### Signs of a problem:

- Your child is staying up later and later to stay on the computer
- Your child gets fidgety, anxious, or angry if they don't have their device
- Tech usage is negatively impacting schoolwork, family life, or other interests
- Your child has difficulty getting virtual imagery out of their head
- Dreaming about virtual imagery
- Hiding their screen usage or device from you
- Your child seems apathetic and bored more easily
- They are perpetually tired yet also wired.
- They become irritable and argumentative when anything negative is said about videogames

### Recommendations regarding screen exposure/use by age:

American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen exposure, with the recent exception for video chatting with family, for children under age 2. Media exposure impairs language development.



For children ages two to five, one hour or less/day of screen time but only with parents interacting with them. Phones, tablets, computers or other devices should not replace parent interaction.

For older children, the recommendation is for no more than 2 hours/day of appropriate content, which is monitored by parents. However, priority is to be given to adequate sleep (8-12 hours depending on age), at least an hour of physical activity, and quality family time.

### Recommendations for managing screens at home:

- Devices and TV should be banned an hour before bedtime and not accessible overnight. Remove or do not put televisions or video games in bedrooms.
- Preview or co-view media with your children. Discuss what is appropriate and what is inappropriate.
- Have media free places and times such as mealtime for all family members including adults.
- Do not allow video games with human targets (including animated people) or games that award points for killing.
- Parents are role models and we all know that if your words and actions don't match, your children will be the first to know. Your child will act like you do, so parents, disconnect yourselves from electronics and connect with your children. Play games, read books, discuss ideas, go for hikes preferable where there is no cell coverage. Have fun.
- Delay getting your child a smart phone until they are at least age 14. The children of Bill and Melinda Gates did not have smart phones until age 14. Many of the people who work in Silicon Valley send their children to Waldorf Schools which are technology free until at least middle school.

**Other ideas:**

The author of *Glow Kids*, Nicholas Kardaras Ph.D, recommends Legos which encourage creativity and hand-eye-coordination. Let them explore their surroundings including experiencing nature. They can help with activities like cooking and cleaning. Exposure to music both listening and simple instruments build brain connections and encourage creativity. Kardaras believes that it is important to let children experience boredom, giving them the opportunity to use their internal resources to work through the challenge of being bored. The state of boredom gives them the opportunity to develop their powers of observation, cultivate patience and an active imagination.

The tech addiction treatment field has identified healthier screen usage as compared with problematic screen usage. Problematic screen usage is termed “digital candy” and includes: video games, mindless YouTube surfing, internet porn, hyper-texting, hyper-social media. Healthier screen usage termed “digital vegetables” include researching a topic, e-mailing, educational video (not including watching others playing video games), video chatting with friends or family, creating music or following a topic or team.

**Citations:**

Kardaras, N. (2016). *Glow Kids: How Screen Addiction Is Hijacking Our Kids-and How to Break the Trance*. St. Martin's Press, Inc., USA.

<https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Pages/Media-and-Children.aspx>