

5 TIPS TO HELP MANAGE CHILDREN'S SCREEN TIME?



At Smartphone Free Childhood New Zealand, we are committed to sharing the latest research to support you and your family in thriving in a digital world. That's why we collaborate with leading researchers at The University of Auckland, specialists in the effects of screen use on children, to develop evidence-based guidelines for families.

1. Set Daily Screen Time Limits

Setting limits has been proven to reduce children's screen use.¹

The **NZ Ministry of Health guidelines** for recreational screen time are:

- **Under 2 years:** No screen time
- **2–4 years:** No more than 1 hour per day (less is better)
- **5–17 years:** No more than 2 hours per day^{2 3}



2. Make Mealtimes Screen-Free

Children who engage in quality conversations with parents — especially about past events and open-ended topics — show better language skills, emotional & social skills, and academic performance.^{4 5 6}

So put the phones away and use mealtimes for family chats. It's a simple way to build stronger connections and support your child's development.



3. Keep Screens Out of Bedrooms and Away Before Bedtime

Limiting screen use two hours before bed improves sleep quality, mood, and memory the next day.^{7 8} We recommend removing all screens from bedrooms two hours before sleep, and keeping them out overnight.

To make this easier, consider keeping all screens out of bedrooms altogether.

Claire Reid Doctoral Researcher,
University of Auckland
PhD Research on the Associations of
Screen Time and Child Development



4 Be a Role Model for Healthy Tech Use

Parents' media use not only influences how much their children use screens^{9 10} — it can also negatively affect their language development and behaviour.^{11 12}

Prioritising face-to-face time sets a great example. Not only is it fun and meaningful, but stronger parent-child relationships are linked to a lower risk of screen overuse and online addiction.^{13 14}

5. Delay Giving Them a Smartphone

Research shows that children who receive smartphones at a younger age have significantly higher daily screen time and are more likely to develop signs of smartphone addiction.¹⁵

Ask yourself: “Do they really need it yet? Is there another option we could use for now?”

If your child travels long distances and you're concerned about their safety, consider a “dumb phone” (a basic phone without internet access). You can find good alternatives on the Smartphone Free Childhood New Zealand website.



- 1 Corkin, M. T., Peterson, E., Henderson, A. M. E., Bird, A., Waldie, K. E., Reese, E., & Morton, S. M. B. (2021b). The Predictors of Screen Time at Two Years in a Large Nationally Diverse Cohort. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 30(8), 2076–2096. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-01985-5>
- 2 Ministry of Health. (2017a). *Sit less, move more, sleep well: Active play guidelines for under-fives*. Ministry of Health. <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/sit-less-move-more-sleep-well-active-play-guidelines-under-fives>
- 3 Ministry of Health. (2017b). *Sit Less, Move More, Sleep Well Physical Activity Guidelines for Children and Young People*. Ministry of Health. <https://www.health.govt.nz/resource/sit-less-move-more-sleep-well>
- 4 Fivush, R. (2007). Maternal Reminiscing Style and Children’s Developing Understanding of Self and Emotion. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 35(1), 37–46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-006-0065-1>
- 5 Laible, D. (2011). Does It Matter if Preschool Children and Mothers Discuss Positive vs. Negative Events During Reminiscing? Links with Mother-reported Attachment, Family Emotional Climate, and Socioemotional Development. *Social Development* (Oxford, England), 20(2), 394–411. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2010.00584.x>
- 6 Neha, T., Reese, E., Schaughency, E., & Taumoepeau, M. (2020). The role of whānau (New Zealand Māori families) for Māori children’s early learning. *Developmental Psychology*, 56(8), 1518–1531. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000835>
- 7 He, J., Tu, Z., Xiao, L., Su, T., & Tang, Y. (2020). Effect of restricting bedtime mobile phone use on sleep, arousal, mood, and working memory: A randomized pilot trial. *PLOS ONE*, 15(2), <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32040492/>
- 8 Orzech, K. M., Grandner, M. A., Roane, B. M., & Carskadon, M. A. (2016). Digital media use in the 2 h before bedtime is associated with sleep variables in university students. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55(A), 43–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.08.049>

- 9 Barr, R., Kirkorian, H., Radesky, J., Coyne, S., Nichols, D., Blanchfield, O., Rusnak, S., Stockdale, L., Ribner, A., Durnez, J., Epstein, M., Heimann, M., Koch, F.-S., Sundqvist, A., Birberg-Thornberg, U., Konrad, C., Slussareff, M., Bus, A., Bellagamba, F., & Fitzpatrick, C. (2020). Beyond Screen Time: A Synergistic Approach to a More Comprehensive Assessment of Family Media Exposure During Early Childhood. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1283–1283. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01283>
- 10 Yang, X., Jiang, P., & Zhu, L. (2023). Parental Problematic Smartphone Use and Children's Executive Function: The Mediating Role of Technoference and the Moderating Role of Children's Age. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 63, 219–227. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2022.12.017>
- 11 Corkin, M. T., Henderson, A. M., Peterson, E. R., Kennedy- Costantini, S., Sharplin, H. S., & Morrison, S. (2021a). Associations between technoference, quality of parent-infant interactions, and infants' vocabulary development. *Infant Behavior & Development*, 64, 101611-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infbeh.2021.101611>
- 12 McDaniel, B. T., & Radesky, J. S. (2018). Technoference: Parent Distraction With Technology and Associations With Child Behavior Problems. *Child Development*, 89(1), 100–109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12822>
- 13 Sadeghi, S., Pouretamad, H. R., Khosrowabadi, R., Fathabadi, J., & Nikbakht, S. (2019). Effects of parent–child interaction training on children who are excessively exposed to digital devices: A pilot study. *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 54(6), 408–423. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091217419837070>
- 14 Wu, X., Chen, X., Han, J., Meng, H., Luo, J., Nydegger, L., & Wu, H. (2013). Prevalence and factors of addictive Internet use among adolescents in Wuhan, China: Interactions of parental relationship with age and hyperactivity-impulsivity. *PloS One*, 8(4), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.006178215>
- 15 Han, S. (2022). Impact of smartphones on students: How age at first use and duration of usage affect learning and academic progress. *Technology in Society*, 70, 102002. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2022.102002>