

Kids and Tech

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It often seems that children are using technology for a large part of the day. Technology is used for learning throughout the school day, as well as after school for leisure activities and social connections. It has many positive aspects, but also poses some potential risks. It's hard to know where the line falls between safe, healthy use and overuse. The following questions may help you identify whether your child is using technology responsibly or whether there may be a problem with how they are spending their time online:

- How often is my child online for educational vs. leisure use?
- Does the amount time spent online cause distractions or procrastination?
- When using technology as a study tool, where is my child finding the information online? How do they know it's quality information?
- What kind of games and apps does my child use for recreation and social connection?
- Does my child have privacy settings on for the games and apps they use?

When your child is online, there are also a few behaviors to watch for to reduce risks. These can frequently lead to more serious challenges and affect your child's mental health:

- Isolation – Too much time being spent online and not enough time face-to-face with family and friends, which can create barriers and an overall sense of loneliness.
- Cyberbullying – Using technology by posting and/or sending pictures or statements with the purpose of embarrassing, harassing, or bullying someone. This can create feelings of unworthiness, loneliness, despair, anger, and fear.
- Inappropriate material – Posting and/or sending inappropriate pictures or content online, which can cause feelings of guilt and shame.
- Inappropriate relationships – Strangers and others trying to form relationships with youth that are unsafe or unhealthy.

Setting boundaries both offline and online allows children to make better decisions. Setting screen-time limits based on leisure use (online games, social media, watching videos, etc.) will allow them to engage in other physical leisure activities such as exercise, hanging out with friends face-to-face, and other extracurricular activities. When children set boundaries, it also allows them to better understand privacy and foster healthy relationships.

Remember, it's all about balance. It's important for all of us, especially children, to learn how to exercise moderation. Technology isn't going anywhere and learning healthy usage is key!