What is Internet addiction?

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One major risk that Internet users may fall into is

Internet addiction

It is commonly known as **Internet addiction disorder (IAD)**. Individuals with IAD use the Internet excessively. This often interferes with their daily lives, leading to problematic behavior.

Source: SEAMEO INNOTECH

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Signs to watch out for Internet addiction

"Less interest in social activities like meeting friends or playing sports"

"Not doing so well at school"

"Tiredness, sleep disturbance, headaches, digital eye strain"

"Changes in eating patterns"

"Reduced (care for) personal hygiene"

"Obsession with particular websites or games"

"Extreme anger when being asked to take a break from online activity" or when Internet connection is not working

"Appearing anxious or irritable" when not using the computer, tablet, or phone

"Becoming withdrawn from friends and family"

Source: eSafety Commissioner, Australian Government

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How much time online is too much?

There is **no magic figure** for how much screen time your child should have. Screen time is **not a one-size-fits-all** matter. There are **no hard and fast rules**, but here are some things to consider.

The ideal amount of screen time depends on a range of factors, such as age, maturity level, and nature of activities.

When it comes to the screen time of your child, you should not only focus on the clock. The quality and nature of your child's online activities and your involvement are also important.

It's hard to get a good read on the right amount of screen time for children, but do so while also considering their overall health and well-being.

Is their social behavior unacceptable?

Are they getting enough exercise, rest, and sleep?

Questions like these can help you and your child find the perfect balance between online and offline activities.

Source: eSafety Commissioner, Australian Government

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Acceptable screen time for younger kids

AAP (2016) updated policy/recommendation

<18 months old

discouraged
from using digital media
except for video-chatting

18-24 months old

avoid
using digital media alone
practice co-use or joint media engagement (JME)

2 to 5 years old

should consume
up to 1 hour daily
quality screen time with JME

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

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How to help your child manage their online time

Stay connected and encourage balance

- "Talk to your child regularly and help them stay aware of how much time they are spending on different online and offline activities."
- "Play games together" or explore some family-friendly online projects to strengthen your connection with your child and help build their social skills.
- "Where possible, avoid limiting online time as a punishment" as this approach can make children more attached to the Internet.

Create a plan and implement house rules on digital media use

- "Young people are more likely to respond to rules they have contributed to and see them as being fair and consistent. Work out the plan together."

Be a good role model

- As a parent, you should be able to show to your child how to respect and observe the rules you made as a family, and to apply the agreed consequences when rules are not followed.

Make use of helpful apps and digital tools

- Use parental controls to monitor and limit what your child sees and does online.
- Explore apps and softwares that measure online time or set time limits on device usage and Internet access.
- "Be honest and open with your children about why and how you want to use these technologies."

Source: eSafety Commissioner, Australian Government

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Encouraging healthy screen habits among teens (Dr. Paul Wiegel)

Structure day
(daily routine)

Supervise

Serve as role models

Family discussion

- parents more of a guide than a “police”
- online together
- open dialogue about technology and relationships
- be curious not judgmental

Source: Children and Screens YouTube Channel

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Setting boundaries on digital device use at home

The eSafety Commissioner recommends having "**device-free zones and times**" to help you manage your and your children's screen time. Your family plan can include the following rules:

[For all family members] Turn off all devices at least one hour before bedtime.

[For older children] Switch off devices in the bedroom after a certain period.

[For younger children] No devices in the bedroom.

[For all family members] Switch off all devices at dinner time.

[For older children] Charging of devices overnight should be done outside the bedroom in a place your child cannot access.

Source: eSafety Commissioner, Australian Government

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Keep in Mind

The pandemic has highlighted the benefits of digital technology for children's learning. However, parents should keep an eye out for any signs of Internet addiction before the situation becomes out of hand.

Promote a healthy and balanced use of the Internet by modeling proper behavior, and setting rules together with your child.

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Sources

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