



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCREEN USE

**Indian Psychiatric Society**

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## Message



We have seen an unprecedented advancements in information technology and internet based technology in last few decades. These developments led to an overall advancements and far reaching consequences in wide variety of areas like communication, social interaction, work environment, education, entertainment etc. Hardly any area of living remain untouched with this technological progress and it has made our life easy. However, this fast paced developments has brought a plethora of health and mental health consequences with it.

People are unable to regulate the screen time usages and a variety of health consequences both for physical health and mental health are being observed. There is an urgent need to deal with the issues of unregulated screen use in all age groups and specifically in children and adolescents.

Lots of general public, medical and mental health professionals keeps on enquiring about the appropriate screen time for people in different age groups.

I congratulate and thank “Cyberpsychology and Mental Health” speciality section of Indian Psychiatric Society for bringing these “Recommendations for Screen Use.” This is also the most appropriate time for such document as the world is dealing with COVID-19 Pandemic and screen use have significantly increased.

My sincere best wishes to everyone involved.

**Dr. P. K. Dalal**  
President,  
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## Foreword

The use of screens in different forms, e.g. television, cellphones, tablets, laptops and video game monitors is a growing phenomenon worldwide. Without doubt, the new technology has immense benefits like help in acquisition of knowledge, communication, social networking etc. But any new technology has its downside if used unwisely, and the same holds true for digital media. The growing incidence of online and offline addictions and behaviors like cyberstalking, cyberbullying and webcam sex tourism are a testimony to this imminent danger.

The Indian Psychiatric Society, in keeping with its objectives, and in an endeavor to educate the public on the harmful effects of the cyberspace has come out with the following “Recommendations For Screen Use” for different age groups. Following these recommendations will go a long way in helping an individual reap the benefits the cyberspace offers, without suffering the potential ills that an inappropriate use of this technology can lead to.

Readers may notice some variations from similar recommendations made by different international bodies, which is inevitable. We have attempted to incorporate recommendations backed by research, wherever possible. An attempt is also made to give clear recommendations without ambiguity, to make it easier for the readers to implement.

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## Contents

- **Recommendations For Media Use In Infants and Young Children  
(Up to 5 Years of Age)** 4
- **Recommendations For Media Use By Children and Adolescents  
(5 to 18 Years of Age)** 6
- **Personal Digital - Time Management Tips (For Adults)** 8

## **Recommendations For Media Use In Infants and Young Children (Up to 5 Years of Age)**

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Infancy is a period of rapid brain development and absorbing environmental influences with far-reaching consequences. A frequent social interaction with parent figures at this age is crucial for the development of intellectual, linguistic, motoric (movement) and social-emotional skills. These days, a frequent exposure of small children to screens (like tablets, smartphones, TVs, computers etc.) is posing serious challenges concerning child development. Excessive exposure to media at this age can have a profound impact on physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing. It can compromise development, manifesting in the form of obesity, sleeplessness, restlessness, irritability, delayed speech, failure of social communication, impaired attachment, intellectual underachievement, and so on. Such exposure can harm an individual concerning his or her long-term intellectual and psychosocial development. At this age children would learn and benefit from exploring the environment and nature, playing with toys and games in real-time, interacting with people and the real world, not the virtual world.

In lieu of the above hazards, the following recommendations are being made.

- Screen use needs to be completely avoided in children less than two years of age.
- For children between 2 to 5 years of age, the introduction of digital media content is not necessarily an entitlement or necessity. If introduced, it is always preferred to be under parental or adult guidance and monitoring.
- For children between 2 to 5 years of age, viewing should be introduced for specific purposes like educational games or teaching aid for a limited period (not longer than 30 minutes per session, and not more than two sessions per day, under supervision - a shared media use), rather than for entertainment. Adult interaction with the child during media use is crucial. It is to be noted that for small children, knowledge gained through the media is not easily transferred to the real-life 3-dimensional world.
- It needs to be kept in mind that the use of media may turn into an addictive habit, affecting the brain structurally and functionally, and difficult to regulate later.
- Avoid fast-paced programs and apps with lots of distracting content. This creates difficulty with concentration later. Avoid any violent content.
- Turn off the television and other devices when not in use.

- Avoid digital time being used as a pacifier to calm, to distract (as while feeding) or to keep the child engaged, as a means to have peace for you. Over long time, this promotes excessive use.
- Keep bedroom, mealtimes, and parent-child playtimes screen-free for children and parents.
- No screens 1 hour before bedtime, and remove devices from the bedroom.
- Be a good role model. Parent media use is a strong predictor of child media habits. Use media only sparingly in the presence of the child, and only if you must.
- Try to enhance your interactions with the child. There is no substitute for a real human being. Invest your time in your child; it will pay you later on.

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## **Recommendations For Media Use By Children and Adolescents (5 to 18 Years of Age)**

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The use of media (such as television, smartphones, tablets, videogames) is very rapidly increasing in children and adolescents. While this has its benefits like exposure to new ideas, acquiring knowledge, increased opportunities for social contact and support, and new opportunities to access health-promoting information, the harmful effects are many and cannot be ignored. The latter include increased risk of obesity, sleeplessness, eye-strain and headache, exposure to inaccurate, inappropriate and unsafe content and contacts, compromised privacy, screen-related addictions of various types (like gaming, pornography and social media), and academic decline. Considering these, parents need to ensure that their child is shielded from the undesirable effects of the media, and uses the latter creatively and constructively.

To this end, the Indian Psychiatric Society makes the following recommendations to parents.

- Digital literacy is important and cannot be ignored. Help your child embrace technology in healthy ways and safely navigate the digital world.
- Have realistic and reasonable ground rules. Preferably, these should be mutually discussed and agreed upon.
- Discuss a time-monitoring plan beforehand.
- Discourage media use during mealtimes and while doing homework.
- Let the gadget be used in a common room, rather than in seclusion.
- To restrict their online activity to healthy browsing, use parental control software, control filters, PIN passwords, or safe search. You may consult an expert on these.
- Promote that children get a daily physical activity for at least an hour, and adequate sleep (8-12 hours, depending on the age). Encourage activities that are likely to facilitate development and health, such as reading, talking and playing together.
- Ensure that children do not sleep with devices (like tablet or smartphone). Avoid exposure to screen for one hour before bedtime.
- Designate media-free times (e.g. dinner) together.
- Engage in selecting and co-viewing media with your child to foster safe, creative and positive use of the media. Help children understand what they are seeing and help them apply what they have learnt to the world around them. Share these experiences with your family and the community.

- Discuss prior with the child about monitoring their content on the various social media platforms to help both build a mutual trust and sense of responsible communication. Inform the child/adolescent to discuss beforehand any new platform or app the child wants to try, and to be tried and tested together with parents for its appropriateness.
  - Proactively look for possible evolving threats and warn them about the same. Gently guide them how to respond when they come across any disturbing or inappropriate content.
  - To prevent children from being exploited online, advise them the following safety measures -
    - Avoid posting personal information like address, phone number or pictures.
    - Avoid opening e-mails or attachments from unknown people.
    - Avoid becoming online “friends” with unknown people.
    - Never arrange to meet someone in person whom they have met online.
    - May use a made up name or nickname on the profile.
    - Use an email address that does not include their name.
    - Use the strongest privacy setting when setting up profile to ensure that only desirable individuals view their information.
    - Share pictures and videos very carefully when uploading - even with known persons, as it can easily spread much further.
  - Educate children about the inappropriateness of posting specific content (e.g. personal, sexual, casteist, religion-centered) on the media. Teach the importance of being respectful in screen interactions.
  - Discuss with them about how they plan to handle negative (disturbing, embarrassing) reactions to their posts.
  - Ask them to talk to you in case they feel discomforted by any content sent to them by others.
  - Give a listening ear and understand from the children about their own understanding and experience of the digital world.
  - Communicate the guidelines to other caregivers e.g. babysitters and grandparents, so that media rules are followed consistently.
  - Don't send exclusively frightening messages to children about digital media, but about learning to adapt and circumvent the challenges related to these. Focus on fostering healthy habits that will stay for a lifetime.
  - Use technology to bond rather than break the parent-child relationship in these crucial growing years.
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## **Personal Digital - Time Management Tips (For Adults)**

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Use of digital gadgets, especially smartphones with Internet access, is increasing rapidly the world over, and more so in India. Though such gadgets are of immense value in communication, acquiring knowledge, and social connectivity, they come with their own risks like online or offline habit formations of various types, spending excessive hours using them and socially undesirable outcomes if used unwisely. All users of such gadgets need to be aware of the precautions to be followed to save one from their ill effects.

With this consideration, the Indian Psychiatric Society makes the following recommendations for personal digital-time management.

- Have a deliberate plan of usage, based on the need and duration of the use of the gadget.
- Look out for gadget-free fun and educational activities.
- Have a plan of action to deal with unintended reactions to posts, like not responding to these immediately.
- Schedule specific times to reply to posts/messages/mails. Respond only when you have the time to craft a thoughtful response.
- To get optimum sleep, keep your bedroom free of gadgets and avoid using them within one hour of bedtime.
- Remove from your cellphone all unnecessary applications that you had downloaded impulsively or those not being used at present.
- While working, and if there is no need for the phone, keep it away and difficult to access till the work is accomplished.
- Use application (like Appdetox, Moment) to help you track your smartphone usage and regulate it. Such applications give you a feedback about the extent of your screen use and set your own rules for your apps.
- To protect your personal information and computer online, please follow these recommendations for your device -
  - Instal up to date anti-virus software on your device.
  - Keep your internet browser up to date.
  - Be alert to any unusual computer activity or problems.
  - Instal and maintain a firewall on your computer.
  - Use a modern browser with features such as a pop-up blocker.

- Avoid storing sensitive material indefinitely on your device.
- Change your passwords often.
- Try “confidential mode” in your e-mails to help protect sensitive information from unauthorized access.
- Beware of links sent via e-mail attachments
- Talk to someone you trust when you face online difficulties. You may also consult a mental health professional (like a counselor or a psychiatrist) if you are unable to help yourself with judicious screen use.

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