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Screens off, fun on – What every parent should know about kid's screen time

Throughout the year, Health Plan of San Joaquin (HPSJ) works with local schools, places of worship, neighborhood businesses, healthcare providers, local community groups and plan members to help us keep well and safe.

Now, with the holiday season, HPSJ is providing screen-time guidance for parents.

How young is too young for kids to use screens? And what limits should parents set? One of the first things babies reach for is a toy. But for many kids, tablets and cell-phones are not far behind. Here is an age-by-age guide.

Under 18 months: Video chats with family and friends are fine. But that is all. Babies and young children learn best with active exploration.

18 to 24 months: Very limited screen time is ok, but there is no rush. If you do allow it, always watch or play with your child. Talk and teach while they watch.

2 to 5 years: Limit screen time to a maximum of one hour a day and keep watching together.

6 and up: Limit screen time in a

way that makes sense for your family. Be sure it does not crowd out things in your child's needs to thrive like sleep, family time and exercise.

Set some house rules

One way to make sure screen time is well spent, is to set a few rules kids can understand about when and where they can watch. For instance: No screens at meals, No screens during homework time (unless it's for school assignments), No screens in bed.

You also have the final say on what they watch. For young kids, it is best to stick with content that is educational and interactive. For older kids, just make sure it is not too grown-up for their age. And share your point of view on what they see. Be sure grandparents and caregivers know and follow these rules, too.

Screens off, fun on.

There are lots of fun ways for kids to enjoy themselves without screens. When they are bored, encourage them to draw, write stories or play ball. Turning off screens is also a chance to do things as a family. You can read aloud to your kids,

play board games, or teach them a hobby or sport. Show them you do not need a screen to have a good time.

More practical advice from HPSJ Health Education & Population Health Manager Setar Testo, MPH – “We all want the best for our children. During the holidays that means we can keep them safe and healthy by helping them limit their screen time. Step away from the screens and focus on making those precious holiday memories. Read some holiday books together, cook some food or make some snacks. In these and other ways, time together is just what we need at the end of this year.”

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

For more ways to stay safe during the holidays and beyond, the HPSJ website has a COVID-19 community vaccination and testing calendar at www.hpsj.com/decide. Learn more about differences between COVID-19, allergies, colds and flu – and how to help avoid getting sick at www.hpsj.com/flu/.

