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Balancing screen time when the family is stuck at home

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Nearly the whole country continues to "shelter in place," which may mean an overload of screen time for everyone, especially children.

Many parents are having to manage being a homeschool teacher and remote worker, all while juggling the usual stress of parenthood—indefinitely.

FIU Psychologist Justin Parent offers advice on screen time to help parents keep calm and stay sane.

1. Physical but not social distancing. This is not a time to completely isolate ourselves from others. Screen time provides opportunities for positive social interaction. Technology like video chat (e.g., Google Duo, Viber, Zoom) and online multiplayer games can turn screen time into social time by supporting virtual playdates, face time with extended family, and shared creative activities like building a house together in Minecraft.
2. Lots of breaks. Many kids are doing remote schoolwork from a laptop or tablet, which means their screen time during this period will significantly increase. This doesn't mean they have to be in front of a screen for six or seven hours straight. Whenever possible, schedule a few minutes during their "school hours" to step away from their screens and engage in a physical activity at home—especially if they're feeling stuck or frustrated about an assignment.
3. Join in on the fun. Parents can more effectively monitor screen time content by watching their children play or even playing alongside them. Joining in is also a perfect time to highlight positive aspects of the content, such as the creativity children demonstrate while playing games like Roblox. When you are concerned about content, use trusted sources like Common Sense Media to get quick, accurate information.
4. There's help for setting limits. Using Apple's Screen Time, Android's Digital Wellbeing or Circle can help you set specific time limits that are appropriate for your child. Use tech-supports

to limit exciting or emotionally charged screen time in the hour before bed and even schedule screen-free times, like during meals or family board games.

5. Don't forgot to take care of yourself, too! When you notice you're starting to feel overwhelmed, it's okay to occasionally use child screen time to give yourself a break. During times of stress, it's especially important to prioritize things that support your wellbeing—like taking breaks, a healthy sleep schedule, a calming cup of tea, video chat with friends, or mindfulness exercise through apps like Headspace or Calm. Also, if you find yourself getting sucked into the news or panic-filled social media feeds, consider using Apple's Screen Time or other programs to set a limit for yourself for news or social media time each day, so you know when it's time to step away.

Parent is the director of the Child and Family Well-being Clinic and Lab at FIU's Center for Children and Families. His clinic offers free online tech parenting workshops for parents of children ages 4 to 11. The workshops help parents manage their child's use of smartphones, tablets, video games and other devices, and explain how to set parental controls.

Provided by Florida International University

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