

Does your kid need a summer vacation from smartphones?

June 1 2023, by Cara Murez



Summer vacation has begun for some families and screen use may

already feel like too much.

A psychiatrist from Baylor College of Medicine in Houston offers some tips for making sure smartphones and tablets are put to good use and not used to excess.

[Dr. Laurel Williams](#), a professor in the department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, said no arbitrary number of hours spent online indicates addiction. She suggests parents should focus on their child's behavior toward their phone. If something seems different or problematic, that might be a warning sign of too much screen time.

"It could be that your child is not talking to anyone at home, talking less, always spending time in their room or getting anxious or unhappy about whatever they see or do online," Williams said in a college news release.

Kids tend to get less physical activity when they overuse devices, whether watching TV, playing video games or scrolling through social media.

They need to be active, and they also need to pursue some enrichment to make sure they are ready for their studies in the fall.

Poorer children who can't afford to participate in summer enrichment programs often lose knowledge during the break and take longer to catch up at the start of the school year, Williams noted.

Some may not have many options other than turning to their screen for entertainment.

"If your child is engaging in mindless activities, that could be a problem academically. It's not necessarily a bad thing to spend time on the phone, but make sure their screen activity is not causing any harm," she said.

Williams suggests finding free online tools to play or subscription-based educational games.

Parents who can't send their child to activities should access school resources for information on apps or websites that promote a safe, educational environment for kids, she said.

Also, show interest in your child's educational games so they feel encouraged to continue while monitoring their progression, Williams recommends.

"Kids often want to show you what they've done—they want you to be proud of them. If you don't show interest or check to see if they've done it, don't be surprised if your child loses interest," Williams said.

It's important to track your child's screen activity, with an eye out for bullying and negative content. Children may not realize that people are nastier when anonymous or understand the subtle cues and lack of consequences for being mean online. Using parental controls helps, but it's still important to look at the history, Williams said.

"There is clear evidence that social media can lead to anxiety, depression and problematic eating issues, especially for girls. They see curated images of people that are not real, so it really preys on that adolescent stage where (they) want to belong," Williams said.

More information: Worried about your kid's screen use? Common Sense Media has a guide to [parental controls](#).

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