

Using screens and TVs effectively

Understanding screen time

Screens are everywhere nowadays – on TVs, phones, tablets, and computers. While screens can offer a wide range of entertainment and educational content, such as videos, games, and shows, evidence shows that excessive screen use can negatively affect children's language development. It's important to find a healthy balance between using technology and supporting our children's development.

Screens and their uses

Technology can certainly support learning and development. However, **excessive or unstructured screen time** can lead to several challenges. Here's why:



Reduced social interaction

Children learn best through **face-to-face interactions**. The more time they spend on screens, the fewer opportunities they have to talk, play, take turns, and listen to the sounds around them – all of which are essential for social and communication development.

Limited language growth

Language development occurs most effectively through **real-life experiences**. For example, when parents and carers narrate daily activities or label objects in the environment, children learn new vocabulary and sentence structures. More screen time often means less real-world language input.





Delayed language

Research shows that too much screen time can contribute to **delayed language**. Children who frequently use tablets, phones, or TVs may start speaking later than their peers.

Poor attention and listening skills

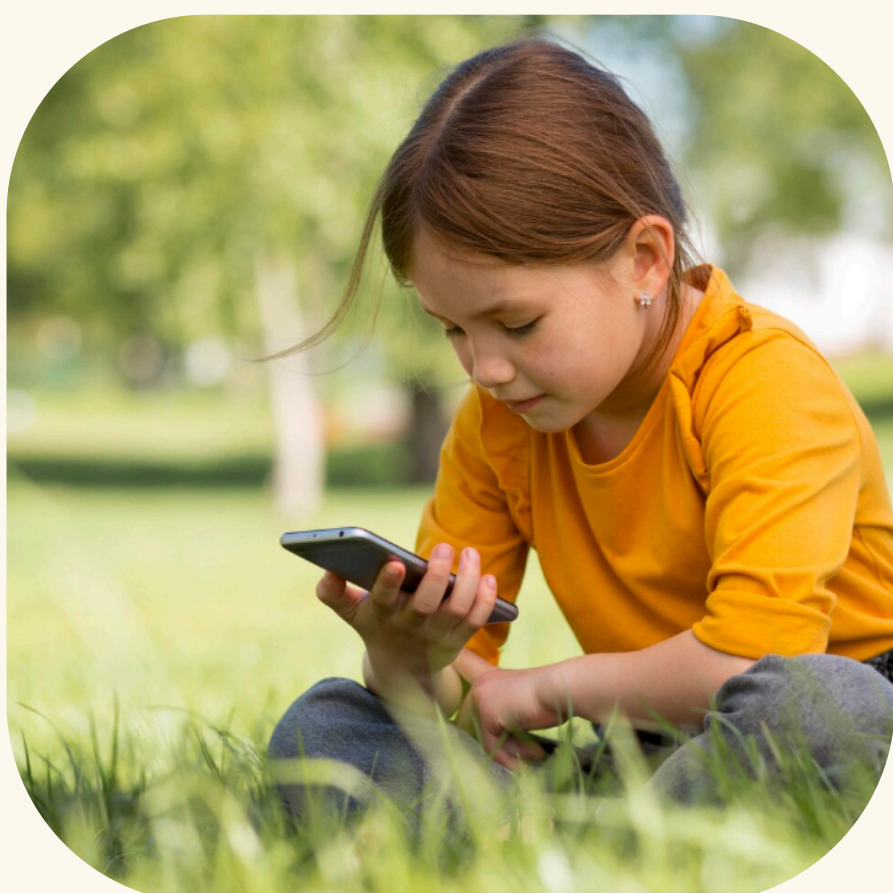
Fast-paced, overstimulating content can impact children's **attention spans** and **listening skills**. It may make it harder for them to concentrate during real-life conversations or follow instructions.



How can we use screens wisely?

1 Prioritise face-to-face interaction

The most effective way to support your child's speech and language skills is through **daily conversation**. Face-to-face interactions allow you to model language, narrate daily events, ask open-ended questions, and play together.



2 Limit screen time

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends:

- **Ages 0–2: No screen time**, except for video calls.
- **Ages 2–5:** No more than **30 minutes** per day.
- **Ages 6–17:** Limit to **1–2 hours** per day and a maximum of 2–3 hours on weekends.

3 Screens can't soothe like you do

Try not to use screens to calm or distract your child. Research suggests this can affect their ability to **self-regulate** emotions later in life. Instead, consider alternatives like reading a book, going outside, or offering a cuddle.



4 Set a routine

Avoid screen use **1–2 hours before bedtime** to support healthy sleep habits. Also, keep devices **out of bedrooms** overnight.



5 Be active

Encourage your child to take part in **physical activities**. Outdoor play stimulates their senses with colours, sounds, animals, and people — all excellent opportunities to model and build language.

6 Create screen-free zones

Designate areas like bedrooms and the dining table as **screen-free zones** — and make sure adults follow the same rule! Use these spaces for conversation, reading, spending quality time.



7 Watch together

The bigger the screen, the better! Whenever possible, **watch with your child** and engage with the content. Talk about the characters, locations or scenes, predict what might happen next and connect the storylines to real-life experiences

This turns passive watching into an opportunity for learning.



8 Be the role model

Children learn best by watching adults. Show them how to manage screen time responsibly by practising it yourself!



Let's work together to guide our children to use screens wisely – not as a substitute for interaction, but as a tool, with balance and intention.

Does your child have a phone? Tablet? TV? How long can they go on screen? What do they watch? Where do they use their device? What can we do?

For further information, please visit
<https://www.bedsiltonchildrenshealth.nhs.uk/screen-time>

Or scan the QR code

