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Education and Training



Turner School

## Content, not screen time, matters for kids

This was the headline of a newspaper article (*The Sun-Herald*, 18 October 2015). The article states the Australian screen time guidelines (modelled on the US ones) of no TV, DVDs, computer or electronic games for children under two, less than one hour a day for those between two and five, and no more than two hours a day for children aged five to 17. The article considers some current viewpoints that these guidelines are obsolete in the digital age, and that monitoring 'screen time' is not what matters most, but the monitoring of the media content that children are accessing is the real priority.

The article quotes the research done by Professor Stephen Houghton of the University of Western Australia and also Australian child technology expert Dr Kirsty Goodwin. Houghton's research found some social media and gaming could be detrimental to young people's wellbeing and Goodwin cautions 'by focussing narrowly on how much screen time children use, we overlook other critical considerations such as what children are watching or creating when they're using screens.'

Some of the research also cautions that longer screen times may be affecting sleep by reducing the time spent doing other activities – such as exercise – that may be beneficial for sleep and sleep regulation. Screen time in the hours directly prior to sleep is problematic in a number of ways other than just displacing the bed and sleep times of children and adolescents. Exposure to the light emissions from devices in the hours before sleep can increase alertness and can also disrupt the body's naturally occurring circadian (or daily) rhythms by suppressing the release of the hormone melatonin, which is important for maintaining and regulating our sleep-wake cycle. Removing electronic devices from the bedroom provides a good sleep environment and promotes good sleep practices.



After all those cautionary reminders, we need to end on a positive! We all know there are amazing benefits to the use of electronic media for recreation and learning for children and with suitable content and appropriate control and supervision, it certainly is possible to derive benefits from electronic media while avoiding its detrimental influences.

Increasingly our teachers at Turner are having conversations around behaviours that some children are demonstrating that indicate exposure to and engagement with content that is not suitable for them. We are concerned when a child talks, enacts

social play, draws or writes about characters from online or video games that we know are M or R rated. Scary video games and scary TV shows (even the News), feed children's imaginations in a negative way. Young children, particularly those under 8 find it difficult to determine what is real and what is fantasy and can become upset or obsessed with these scary themes. Jen Faul has written more about this to the 1/2 families in her website team leader update as this is an issue for some of our 1/2 children at the moment.

As with everything, moderation and balance is the key. In the home we need to ensure children are never isolated in their own technological cocoon and are accessing appropriate content online and importantly lots of time with family members.

**Jo Padgham**