

## Kids, Tweens, Teens and Screens

Anne-Marie Chang (Pennsylvania State University), Lauren Hale (Stony Brook University), Lauren Hartstein (University of Colorado, Boulder), Monique LeBourgeois (University of Colorado, Boulder), David Reichenberger (Pennsylvania State University). (alphabetical order)

In today's world, it is common for youth of all ages to engage in screen-based digital media. In 2019, teens spent an average of 7 hours and 22 minutes a day using screens. Tweens spent an average of 4 hours and 44 minutes a day using screens. Even children under 8 years old use screens – for an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes per day. The COVID-19 pandemic has massively changed everyday life. With remote learning and Zoom hangouts, daily screen use has increased even more. Using screen-based devices for long periods of time can lead to later bedtimes, shorter sleep durations, difficulty sleeping, and poorer sleep quality. In 2019, a whopping 36% of teens reported waking up in the middle of the night to check their phones! Getting a good night of sleep is essential for healthy development in children, including physical health, psychological well-being, learning, and safety. This article will discuss how screens can impact sleep and strategies parents can use to promote healthy screen-use behaviors.

Screen use can impact sleep in many ways.

1. **Light** – Screens emit a blue light that disrupts sleep. This light can promote alertness and suppress melatonin, a hormone that tells the body it is time to sleep.
2. **Time** – The more time that is spent using a screen, the less time that is available to get ready for bed or sleep.
3. **Content** – The content on screens – like social media posts – can be exciting or upsetting, which may make it harder to relax and fall asleep.
4. **Noise** – When devices are left in the bedroom, they can make noises (beeps, pings, and alarms) that can wake you up.

There are strategies parents can use to improve sleep health for the whole family.

- Set an appropriate bedtime (not too early and not too late) that allows for enough time in bed before needing to wake up for school or other activities.
- The bedroom should be cool, dark, and quiet.
- Remove all electronic devices from the bedroom. Even if devices are not in use, there may be a temptation to sneak a peek.
- Create a central charging space for the family's devices, outside of the bedroom.
- Engage in relaxing, screen-free routines before bedtime as a family. Reading a paper book is a great option.



- In the evening, dim the lights in the house and reduce or turn off the light from screens.
- Turn off screens at least one hour before bedtime.
- Some people believe they need to unwind before bedtime by watching a screen. We recommend alternative approaches to relax, such as listening to calm music or a podcast. Both of these options involve less light and may be less stimulating.
- If your child is having significant difficulty with their sleep, it may be helpful to speak with your child's pediatrician or seek help from a pediatric sleep specialist.

Many parents have a lot of questions about screen use: How long before bed should we turn off our screens? How much does content, timing, or device type matter? Are younger kids more affected by evening screen use than older kids? Are girls more affected by screen use than boys? Do apps that reduce light from the screen actually work? Does wearing blue-blocking glasses help minimize the effects of light on sleep? And, more recently, how did the shift to remote learning and greater use of screens affect children's sleep? As sleep scientists work to figure out the answers to these important questions, we recommend evaluating and adapting your own screen use and sleep behaviors to see what works best for you.

## Suggested References:

<https://www.common sense media.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-tweens-and-teens-2019>

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