



Kennedy Krieger Institute

Specialized Health Needs Interagency Collaboration

## Increased Screen Time and Protecting Your Child's Vision Helpful Tips for Parents/Guardians

A majority of school districts will be starting school virtually in the fall and screen-based instruction will be the reality. Increased screen time can lead to digital-related eye strain and headaches, problems focusing, excessive blinking, eye rubbing, and feeling tired or cranky are potential warning signs that your child may be experiencing vision trouble. Consider the following suggestions to help prepare your child for using devices during virtual learning.

### Helpful suggestions to alleviate digital eye strain

- *20-20-20 Rule:* Every 20 minutes, look at an object approximately 20 feet away, for 20 seconds. This gives the eyes a break and allows them to return to a natural position. Setting a timer or using apps can help remind your child to take a break at regular intervals.
- *1-2-10 Rule:* A suggestion for positioning screens with mobile phones ideally at 1 foot, desktop devices and laptops at 2 feet, and roughly 10 feet for TV screens.
- Some doctors are suggesting children place an elbow on the table and then rest their head in that hand. From this position, they should tilt their elbow and touch the screen to maintain a healthy distance from the device.
- Experts recommend placing computer monitors at eye-level to reduce neck and back strain. Position hand-held screens so the eye gazes slightly downward, not straight ahead or up.
- Increase text size on screens and consider adding a blue light filter to smartphones and tablets.
- Reduce glare by using a matte screen.
- Staring at digital screens decreases our blink rate. Remind your child to blink their eyes more often than they think they need to avoid dry eyes. Consider using artificial tears to refresh eyes when they feel dry.
- If wearing contact lenses, consider giving eyes a break by wearing glasses.
- Practice good posture when using a screen. Poor posture can contribute to muscle tightness and headaches associated with eye strain. Incorporate movement breaks.
- Outside play can be a great "workout" for vision. Outdoor play allows the opportunity to focus at different distances in natural sunlight.
- **Do not delay vision screening or comprehensive eye exams.** They are essential to identify potential issues with your child's eyesight.

## Lighting

- Room lighting is important. Always use a room light even though the device screen is self-illuminating.
- Indirect lighting that illuminates the wall and ceilings, in combination with a task light, works best.
- If using a task light, position it as far away as possible. Make sure that you cannot see the light source when looking at the screen.
- Level of lighting in a room when using a screen should be roughly half what it would be for other activities such as writing on paper or working on crafts.
- Try to position computers so that light from uncovered windows, lamps and overhead light fixtures aren't shining directly on screens.
- Set up workspaces perpendicular to any windows.
- Adjust screen brightness to avoid a bright screen in a darkened room. If your screen glows brighter than your surroundings, your eyes have to work harder to see.
- Change the background color to cool gray.
- Avoid using digital devices outdoors.

## Setting boundaries

- Incorporate a digital curfew for the entire family at which time electronic devices are turned off for the night. The earlier in the evening the better but set what feels realistic for your family.
- Model good habits in front of your children. Adhere to the same guidelines you are setting for your children.
- Consider charging all devices in a central location outside of bedrooms to avoid overnight use.
- Encourage regular bedtime that allow for adequate sleep. Screen time before bed can harm sleep quality.
- Try not to use “more screen time” as a reward. Keep within your agreed-upon family limit.

## Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2020). Give your child's eyes a screen-time break: Here's why. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/eyes/Pages/What-Too-Much-Screen-Time-Does-to-Your-Childs-Eyes.aspx>

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