

Screen Time vs Green Time

“Brush your teeth, eat your veggies and get plenty of green time!”

In this challenging time of parenting in a digital world (and now with additional challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic) parents want to ensure their children are healthy but many feel overwhelmed about exactly what this means! With regard to how much screen time children should have I explain to parents that there is no magical number of hours deemed “healthy” BUT I do encourage parents to introduce a concept of ‘green time’ alongside screen time.

Our job as parents is to prepare our children to be able to thrive in a digital world. Aside from keeping them safe online and ensuring they are accessing quality, age appropriate content, we need to support them in developing healthy habits - balancing screen time with ‘green time’. It is ideal for all children to understand the importance of ‘green time’ just as they grow to understand why brushing their teeth and eating vegetables needs to be a part of daily life! All elements of ‘green time’ have a mountain of evidence supporting their critical role in supporting the healthy growth and development of our children and young people. So what do I mean when I say ‘green time’??

Green Time helps kids grow



Outside time - refers to traditional green time engaging in any activity outside in the natural world, this has such a restorative effect for our brains.

Moving time - any activity where our children are moving their bodies (online exercise session, bike ride, trampoline, hopscotch...)

Mindful time - this may mean listening to a meditation story or simply google “Mindful activities for children” and you will find a plethora of simple ideas depending on the age of your children.

Social time - before COVID-19 this referred to ensuring our children have time engaging with friends and family face to face. Now the reality due to social isolation expectations means that maintaining social connections and relationships largely needs to occur via an online platform. This means additional screen time to prioritise this, not only is this okay, in fact it is a building block of supporting wellbeing and mental health for our children (and us).

Unstructured time - (children may call this “boring” time at first!) refers to when you say “off you go and find something to do, no screens!”. Children typically complain and then after that their brain’s natural capacity to be creative and explore is activated and yes they find something to do!! Children experiencing “boredom” is very important for their development.

Reading time - this doesn’t just mean encouraging your child to read a book, it may mean them reading a book online, reading a recipe while cooking, reading signs when you are out walking.

‘Green time’ in my household (three children aged 8, 12 and 14) is a well known concept. When I asked one of my children to come inside to set the table for dinner recently, he answered back with “I can’t, I’m getting my green time” (aka shooting basketball hoops with his brother!)... hard to be too cross about that response!!



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