



ADVANCING WELLNESS and RESILIENCE in EDUCATION

Information Brief

Youth and Screen Time: Implications for Social-Emotional Well-Being

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Numerous studies have been conducted to understand the effects of screen time on youth as they develop. While the American Academy of Pediatrics currently recommends youth spend less than **two hours per day** in front of a computer, television or mobile device screen, most youth spend closer to eight hours each day.³ Increased screen time is associated with several physical health and mental health concerns.

For example, children and teens who spend too much time in front of screens are more likely to be **obese**.¹⁶ The sedentary nature of video games reduces the amount of time children are outside or engaging in more active programs. Research also has found that youth who spend too much time in front of screens **have less energy**, report having a **harder time in school and report more sleeping and eating disorders**.³ Studies also have found when children play video games with intense violence for long periods of time, they are more likely to display **aggressive behavior**, as it is not uncommon for children to copy what they see.¹² Male teens and young adults who played a video game where their characters were expected to perform violent acts toward women demonstrated **lower empathy scores** toward female victims in other settings compared to those who did not play the game.¹⁰ School-age youth and teens who spend too much time in front of screens also have been found to **engage in risky behaviors** when they get older. It is important to note that studies are NOT stating that video games alone cause youth to be violent or aggressive, but they certainly contribute to these areas, especially when combined with other factors such as negative peer groups, social isolation and a history of impulsive actions.⁶ There is clear evidence that the younger the child, the greater the impression violent material has on the developing brains and the future connections to aggressive behaviors in later years.⁵ This means **that parental monitoring and control systems** should be in place to ensure preschool and young school-age children are not watching shows or playing games intended for more mature audiences. In addition to the inappropriate content often found in the games or videos, youth also are exposed to commercials and advertisements targeting mature audiences often highlighting products related to excessive alcohol consumption, sex, gambling and violence.⁸

Several video games, even those rated for ages 10 and up, entail opportunities for youth to communicate with other gamers while playing online. Youth with YouTube or other social media accounts frequently comment to one another and position themselves to be at risk for **predatory practices, illicit requests from adults posing to be other children and general cyber-bullying**.¹⁵ While the interactive nature of these games and social media platforms can promote socialization amongst peers, it is important for parents to (a) create rules with their children ensuring they are only communicating with people they have met in face-to-face settings, (b) report inappropriate requests from others, and (c) periodically skim conversations to ensure appropriate language and content is being shared.⁷



Figure 1
Google images

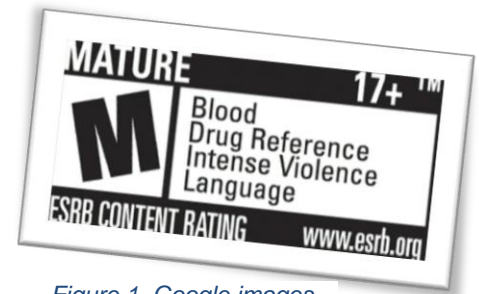


Figure 1. Google images

TIPS FOR FAMILIES TO MINIMIZE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SCREEN TIME

- Designate screen-free zones in the home, especially at the dinner table and children's bedrooms.⁴
- Set viewing times and take a break from the screen at least one hour before bed.
- Engage in community-based initiatives like "Tech-Free Tuesday."¹⁷
- Model appropriate behaviors such as not texting and driving.
- Utilize parental controls to ensure youth are only exposed to developmentally appropriate content.
- Balance screen time with activities that require movement and exercise.
- Log screen time versus active time on a chart or graph.
- If used, make screen time for toddlers and preschoolers interactive and engaging as they learn best from modeling, scaffolding questions and support from adults.
- Encourage family movie nights and use content as "teachable moments."⁹
- Provide other options for children and teens such as outdoor activities, board games, reading, hobbies, sports, art or engaging with nature.
- Keep screen time a "non-event," don't use it as a reward or punishment.¹¹
- Observe your child's behavioral changes, especially if you sense increased aggression, agitation, selfishness or signs of depression. It could be a sign to take a break or seek additional support.¹

Programs and applications (apps) are available to assist parents in ensuring **Internet safety** for youth of all ages. **Parental controls** on computers can ensure a password is required to access certain content or block specific websites. Parents also can regulate content on tablets and phones to block specific sites and ensure apps rated at certain levels cannot be installed or opened. Following your children on their **social media sites** enables you to view posts and responses as well as assess who is also following and commenting on your child's material. Prevent youth from using apps that delete content immediately with no record of their photos, videos or posts. For even more complex monitoring, there are several programs available for purchase that block questionable contacts and ensure easier access to viewing logged conversations.¹² One of the most effective tools in any home is **open communication**. Talking with children often about the dangers of the Internet, the impacts of cyber-bullying and your concerns for their safety produces open dialogue and leads to youth sharing more with you and hiding less.⁷



Figure 2 – freedigitalphotos.net

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) provides consumers objective information about content and age recommendations, so parents and other caregivers can make informed choices considering games and apps appropriate for minors' use. **An interactive elements** category also has been created to understand the game specifications related to **sharing of location, personal information, in-app purchasing requirements and the potential for unrestricted Internet access** through the app or game.⁸ Following these guidelines helps ensure youth are not exposed to content related to **violence, sexual activity, drug use or controversial language** often found in games recommended for mature and adult audiences.¹ It also is important for parents to make individual decisions about their children's maturity levels and have a

good understanding of the **specific content** within each game as some teens may be able understand the fantasy nature of destroying aliens in one game rated *mature* but may not be ready to manage the different aspects of other games rated within the same category.

In addition to the ESRB, **additional resources** are available to help parents and consumers know more about the content and potential exposures found within each game. Websites like commonsensemedia.org provide overviews and other perspectives about development impacts within each game (see graphic above). Family conversation topic ideas also are provided to prompt discussions about what the youth might see or question within each game.

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

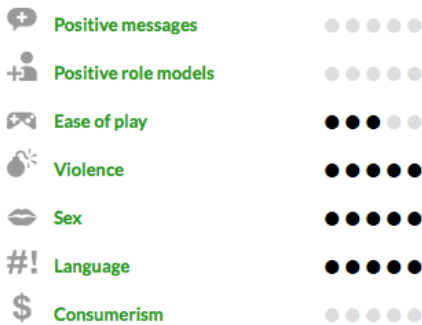


Figure 4. commonsensemedia.org

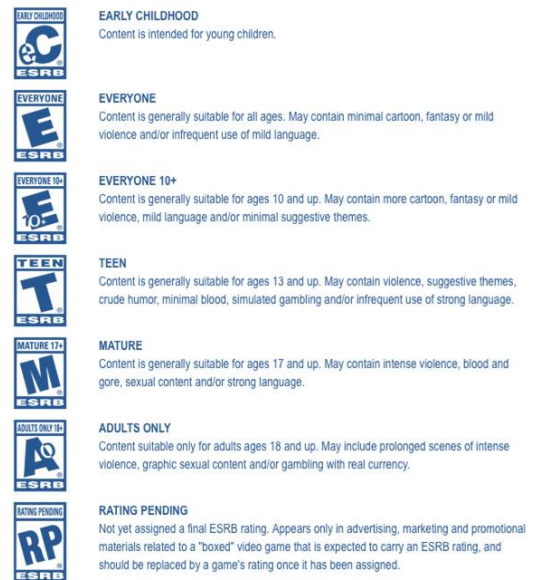


Figure 3. Entertainment Software Rating Board

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