Child Care Provider's Action Sheet
Limiting Screen Time

Introduction

This action sheet provides helpful tips you can take as a child care provider to reduce or eliminate the amount of time children in your care spend in front of a screen (such as a television, computer, or mobile device). Facts on why reducing screen time can help prevent obesity in young children are included, and you can share them with the families of the children for whom you care.

If you are a family child care provider, you may face special challenges in reducing screen time while working with a group of children and strategies are given to help develop daily practices to overcome some of these challenges. You will be instilling healthy behaviors that will influence children's healthy choices for a lifetime.

Did You Know?

- The amount and quality of screen time that children in early care and education are exposed to (and the viewing habits that caregivers/teachers model) can help to decrease childhood obesity (1).
- A recent study found that preschool-aged children who regularly have dinner with their families, get adequate nighttime sleep, and have limited screen time had an ~40% lower prevalence of obesity than those exposed to none of the routines (2).
- 40% of 3-month-old infants are regular viewers of screen media at home (3), and 19% of babies have a TV in their bedroom (4). Therefore, it is recommended that children under the age of two not be exposed to screen time while in out-of-home care (1, 5).
- Children in your care could be at risk of becoming overweight or obese, leading to lifelong health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma, sleep apnea, discrimination based on weight, low self esteem, and adult obesity (6).

What Can You Do?

- Serve as a role model for children by not watching TV while children are in your care. Consider eliminating TVs in rooms where children are present.
- Establish written policy and procedures prohibiting screen time for children under the age of two years. For children two years and older, seek to reduce screen time, aiming for the goal of no more than 30 minutes of educational screen time per week.
- Develop daily program schedules that emphasize physical activity throughout the day, both structured and unstructured, including safe spaces for playing, rolling, and other large muscle activity.
- Utilize outdoor play every day to support physical activity that is age-appropriate and includes a range of intensity. This can include gardens as well as playgrounds where there is ample space for running and playing games.
- Provide a program rich with reading, talking, singing, creative play and much interaction among children and adults. Daily and weekly program schedules which provide many hands-on experiences such as cooking, woodworking, gardening and dramatic play make enriching developmental experiences for children.
- Encouraging news from providers indicates that screen time can be successfully limited or eliminated, even in family child care homes, by carefully planning alternate activities to use throughout the day and during transition times. Children seem to prefer to be active and engaged in non-screen time activities.

continued

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Real Solutions for Real Challenges

- Let children participate fully in age- and developmentally-appropriate household routines such as helping with lunch preparation, setting the table, and cleaning up.
- Incorporate music, books, singing, and dancing in routines throughout the day.
- Reading can be interactive, with each child selecting a book and describing what they see in the pictures or reading aloud.
- Encourage children to role play their favorite characters from a book. Have them draw a scene about their favorite characters during art time.
- During transition times, have the children exercise or play games, such as hot potato.
- When children arrive, have an area set up with different age-appropriate games and learning toys- let each child pick one. Make an art supply cart available for older children.

How Can You Partner with Your Children's Families?

- Share information about the increase in childhood obesity, the impact of screen time on children's health, and the importance of reducing screen time at home and at the child care program.
- Encourage parents to share activities they use at home to reduce screen time and incorporate some of them in the child care program.
- Likewise, share successful ideas that you use and encourage them to try at home! Provide tip sheets that describe alternative activities that can be used at home (e.g., reading, playing board games, pretend play, helping to prepare meals, and safe outdoor and indoor play).
- Ask for family support in:
  - Reducing screen time and assuring their children are exposed to age appropriate, quality media at home; and
  - Modeling limited screen time at home.
- Ask parents/guardians with backgrounds in health/nutrition if they would help you identify ways to promote alternative activities to watching TV or playing on the computer in your program.

Resources

Connecticut State Department of Education. *Action guide for child care nutrition and physical activity policies: Best practices for creating a healthy child care environment.* http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/NutritionEd/CCAG_ActionGuide.pdf.

Let's Move! Child Care. http://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/welcome.html.

National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. *Motion moments videos.* http://nrckids.org/Motion_Moments/index.htm.

The Nemours Foundation. *Best practices for physical activity: A guide to help children grow up healthy.* http://www.nemours.org/content/dam/nemours/www/filebox/service/

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