

BALANCING YOUR CHILD'S DIGITAL DIET

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When considering your child's or young person's digital diet it's important to move beyond the notion of keeping kids safe to look at the types of activities their screen-time might be denying them. There are many aspects to take into account including the maintenance of mental and physical health; fulfilling school and family duties and ensuring that young people develop a full gamut of real world communication skills.

For the sake of living a balanced life ensure your child has sufficient time for:

1. Sleep: It's super important that kids are getting a good night's sleep. Keeping devices out of the bedroom when they are young, and avoiding the screens for at least an hour before bed, helps ensure their sleep needs are met.

2. Boredom: Today's kids don't tend to get as much time to be bored as kids used to. It is an important skill to be able to fill in their time themselves. Bored time promotes creative play and thinking as kids are forced to come up with other ways to amuse themselves.

3. Connection: Face-to-face interaction is obviously crucial for children's social and emotional development and wellbeing. Time with friends, siblings and family members must always be a priority. Learning to engage, problem solve and read body language and facial expressions are all crucial skills that need real-life time and experience to develop.

4. Physical activity: A healthy body and mind requires activity and movement. Kids still love to get out and play. However, some may need a bit more encouragement to remind them.

5. Reflection: Whilst playing games may be described by many kids as their downtime (and yes, there is some validity to this argument) kids also need downtime that involves doing very little. It is in these moments of reflection, of thinking and of pondering, that our ideas come to us and our creativity for other activities flows.

6. Focus: There are times of the day when all of us need to be focused on other tasks. These may be homework, chores, reading a book or the newspaper, building something or making something. There needs to be time in kids' days where they are able to focus solely on a task without the distractions of a screen.

7. Family meals: Getting plenty of good food is of course very important to kids' wellbeing. But it's not just about the food. Sitting at the table with parents, siblings or others, focusing on enjoying a meal together without the need of a screen, helps children to develop good habits while they are young which they can carry into the future.

Obviously there will be times when all these needs are not completely balanced. There will be periods when screens are used more often and times when one or more valuable needs is neglected. But if we can use this as a guide and aim to fit the many key experiences our kids need into each day, we are much more likely to ensure our kids grow up with a healthy respect for their screens and a healthy respect for the many areas of their life that need to be nurtured.