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Gonski Institute  
for Education

# For parents



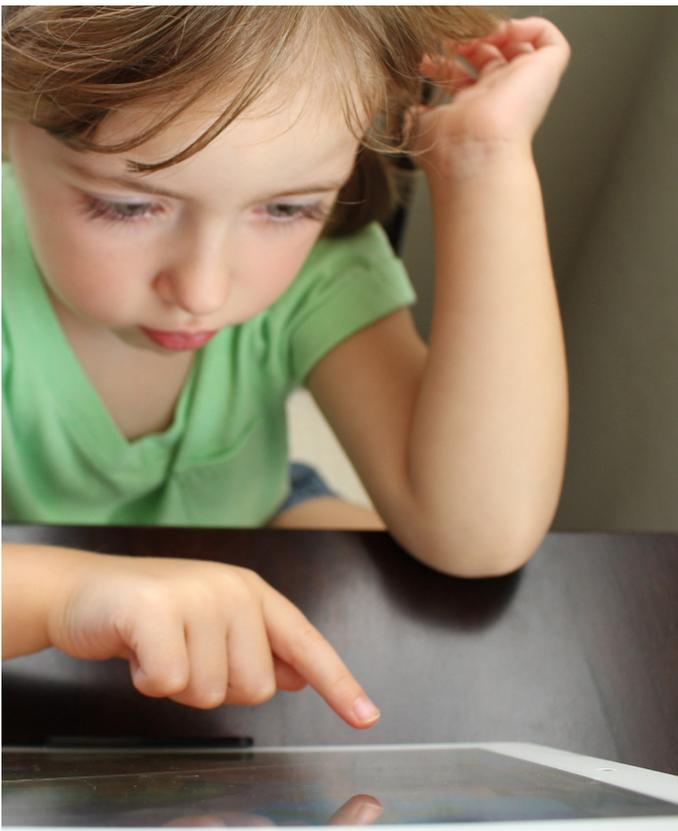
# How to help your child grow up in a digital world?

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We are raising our children in an age of a generational shift. Earlier this year the Royal Children's Hospital Child Health Poll in Melbourne revealed that 94 percent of teenagers, 36 percent of primary children, and 36 percent pre-schoolers have their own screen-based device. According to our recent poll, 92 per cent of parents believe that access to smartphones has reduced the time children have for daily physical activity and free outdoor play. This has us very concerned, and working hard to be the catalyst for change in Australian homes and classrooms.

## Why are we concerned?

Most parents recognise that there are risks that go along with addiction to screens. Risks to their child's physical health, quality of relationships, mental health, sleep, school performance and longer-term outcomes. Most worryingly, some of the dangers may not be realised until well after childhood is complete, and when it is too late to intervene. Fewer parents though have the tools they need to set, and consistently reinforce, effective limits and manage their child's screen time. We do understand the challenges that are present when trying to make a change to your child's entrenched habits, especially with all the other demands on us as parents. But it is vitally important that you set the appropriate limits early, so you give them skills of self-monitoring that they will use for a lifetime.



# What if my child uses screens at school?

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It can be especially difficult for parents to draw the line of balance when screens are increasingly being used as a learning tool. Apart from a couple of very short breaks to eat, drink and go to the toilet, some children spend almost their entire school day 'learning' via a screen. In many schools, there are Bring Your Own Device policies in place. Ask yourself if you are you comfortable with how the school explains the implementation of screen-based technology? If not, you should be encouraged to ask questions to find out whether the device usage is authentic, purposeful and balanced.



We recognise that the use of digital media can be purposeful and a useful tool to support learning, and used in appropriate and balanced ways, hence why we do not advocate for the blanket ban that some states have introduced. But they must be managed- both in the classroom and at home. If your child is at a school that uses screens to support learning, there is a greater need for parents to moderate their child's exposure at home.

# So what can we do?

We are about practical solutions that help parents and schools navigate the digital minefield. So as a parent, what can you do to help your child use screens in a balanced way?



- Restrict or eliminate screen time at home, especially if your child is using them at school. Set a timer and start with small steps such as reducing the screen time by five minutes each day. Another idea to reduce usage is “Screen time followed by Green time”, which means setting time limits on screen time followed by unrestricted free play outdoors.
- Have Digital Detox days and get outside and play.
- Set challenges to make the screen-time purposeful. For example, create a photo collage together after a holiday.
- Be aware of your influence as a role model. Children watch everything we do as parents and it is hard for your message to be heard if your child witnesses you constantly on your phone.

## Growing Up Digital Australia

At the GIE, we are ahead of the game. We are currently wrapping up data collection with school leaders and teachers, who have provided data to help us understand the digital footprint in Australian schools. In 2020, we will be inviting parents to tell us what is happening in their homes and what their children are doing on their screens. Through Growing Up Digital Australia (Phase 2), you can tell us what you are worried about, and in what ways your child is affected by digital media. We are particularly concerned about the equity issues that are affecting access to technology, and the differential impact that screen time might have on children from a range of backgrounds. You can read more about the project here (<https://www.gie.unsw.edu.au/growing-digital-australia>) and please email the research team at [gonski@unsw.edu.au](mailto:gonski@unsw.edu.au) if you would like to participate in the survey.