

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Quality vs. Quantity in Screen Time Makes a Difference and Brain Health Matters- Part 2

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. As the Brain Health Initiative works to translate the science of brain health and performance into usable knowledge, this second part of a two part boost looking at parenting in the digital age focuses on screen time and its impact on young people.

Studies show that teenagers average nine hours of screen time a day. As parents, we worry about the amount of time our kids spend on their phones, tablets, and laptops. In their recent book, [“The Connected Parent: An Expert Guide to Parenting in a Digital World,”](#) authors Urs Gasser and John Palfrey suggest that it’s not the amount of time that our kids are spending online that matters, but what they are doing during that time.

Gasser, professor of practice at Harvard Law School and executive director of the [Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society](#) at Harvard, and Palfrey, president of the MacArthur Foundation, have been researching technology concerns for more than a decade. In an interview with [The Harvard Gazette](#) they pointed out that when it comes to screen time, the important thing is **quality versus quantity**. They said the amount of time our kids spend online is less of a concern than the types of activities in which they are engaging.

COVID-19 restrictions and remote learning have changed the debate over screen time, leaving many students connected to each other mostly through their devices. Gasser and Palfrey said their studies suggest that moderate use of technology can have a positive impact on the social and emotional well-being of young people. Right now, this is one of the safest ways for them to be socially connected.

When determining the right amount of screen time for our kids, we need to consider their age and how they are using the technology. Spending hours gaming (**and make sure you know what types of games they are playing**) is different from communicating with friends, doing homework, or engaging in online communities and becoming active in social causes. Gasser and Palfrey say all of these types of activities can have a different impact on the well-being and development of our kids. From a brain health perspective, research has shown that being socially engaged and having strong social networks can lead to higher levels of cognitive function.

Many of us also worry about social media and screen time increasing the risk of depression and anxiety among young people. The authors said there seems to be increasing levels of stress, anxiety, and depression in young people in general, but they don't necessarily see a causal link between these issues and screen time. They suggest that while screen time is not a cause, it can exacerbate these conditions in young people who have them.

The good news, the authors said, is that good parenting strategies will still be successful in this new digital world.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO BOOST YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Setting brain healthy guidelines is an important part of navigating the digital landscape for your kids. Here are some tips from the Brain Health Initiative and the American Academy of Pediatrics.

- **Create a family technology plan.** Technology should work for you and within your family values and parenting style. Don't let it replace important activities such as face-to-face interaction, family-time, outdoor-play, exercise, unplugged downtime and sleep.
- **Treat technology like other activities.** Know what your kids are doing online. Set limits. Know who their friends are. Know what apps they are using and what sites they are visiting.
- **Engage with your kids online.** Screen time doesn't have to be alone time. Play a game with your kids or watch a video with them.
- **Create tech-free zones.** Designate certain times and areas as screen-free times, such as no phones at mealtime or bedrooms are screen-free.
- **Teach your kids about privacy.** Make sure they understand that once they share something online it can't be deleted.
- **Be forgiving.** Kids will make mistakes so try to be understanding and treat mistakes as teachable moments.
- And as always, remember to **BE BRAIN HEALTHY. Adopt a Brain Healthy Lifestyle**, including thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote:
 - Stress resilience
 - Nutrition
 - Physical activity
 - Sleep
 - Social connection
 - Emotional wellbeing

- Meaning and Purpose
- Cognitive stimulation and creativity
- Engaging with nature
- General health
- Positive impacts

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to protecting brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is a collaborative effort with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, and the Academy for Brain Health and Performance to build brain healthy communities through education, collaboration, research, innovation, and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early detection, evidence-based intervention and optimization of performance*. The BHI is creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the brain health movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).