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Watch the screen time

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While in our school district we are excited about an iPad initiative beginning this fall with all freshmen, we will emphasize the importance of maintaining a healthy life balance when leveraging these powerful tools. We are cognizant of the reality that increasing use of mobile devices and computers, along with customary TV watching, has resulted in alarmingly high levels of daily "screen time". A recent study by the National Center for Health Statistics found that only 27% of children ages 12-15 meet the recommended limit of two hours or less of TV and computer use daily.

Statistics have shown that excessive screen time use by children has been linked to elevated blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and being overweight or obese. Studies also have shown excessive screen and Internet addiction is associated with structural and functional changes in brain development involving emotional processing, executive attention, decision-making and cognitive control. Excessive technology clearly can negatively impact children's social, emotional and intellectual development. Unfortunately, excessive screen time habits and patterns in adolescence continue into adulthood.

Some of the signs of having electronic screen syndrome include:

- Missing social gatherings and other events
- Eating meals in front of the TV, mobile device or computer
- Going to bed with the TV on
- Being more impulsive or moody and being unable to pay attention

In confronting and managing the overwhelming use of technology in our lives, as parents and guardians, it's critical to both model and enact approaches and practices that reflect a balance. A few of these approaches that foster a balanced life style include:

- Prioritize screen time to place an emphasis on creative work and learning activities
- Have regularly scheduled family meals and have the rule that no technology is allowed.
- Turn off all technology 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Pick one day each week that is a "No Technology Day".
- Require regular outdoor play and recreation time.
- Develop a hobby or interest that is technology-free.
- Schedule regular visits to the local library and museums and take advantage of the many cultural events in this area.

As we mold and shape our communities' most precious asset, our youth, it's critical to reinforce balance and moderation in our lifestyles. Take time to reflect on your family's technology use and enact some positive measures that will help our children thrive and flourish.