



# National Poll on Children's Health

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C.S. Mott Children's Hospital

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## Screening out Screen Time: Parents Limit Media Use for Young Children

### Report Highlights

**26% of parents report that their children 2-5 years old have 3 or more hours of entertainment screen time a day.**

**53% of parents of young children limit the locations where their children can use media devices (for example: not in bedroom or at mealtime).**

**13% of parents report no limits on media device location or screen time limits for their young children.**

As access grows to entertainment media devices, so do concerns about young children and screen time. Excessive screen time from traditional sources like television has been linked to ADHD, obesity, poor sleep habits, and other problems in young children.

In 2013, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued updated guidelines to recommend limits on screen time for children and to suggest practical ways families can manage media use. The AAP discourages any screen time for children less than two years of age. For older children, the AAP recommends no more than two hours daily. For strategies to help caregivers manage media consumption in the home, the AAP suggests keeping media devices out of children's bedrooms, keeping family routines like mealtime screen-free, and setting screen-free days for the whole family.

Given rapid changes in the media landscape with new technologies, limiting young children's entertainment screen time remains a challenge. Since the AAP issued its previous set of children's screen time guidelines in 2010, it has become clear that children's media consumption is quickly shifting from traditional sources like television and DVDs to mobile devices like smartphones and tablets.

In March 2014, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents with young children (1-5 years old) about their household media habits and their children's screen time.

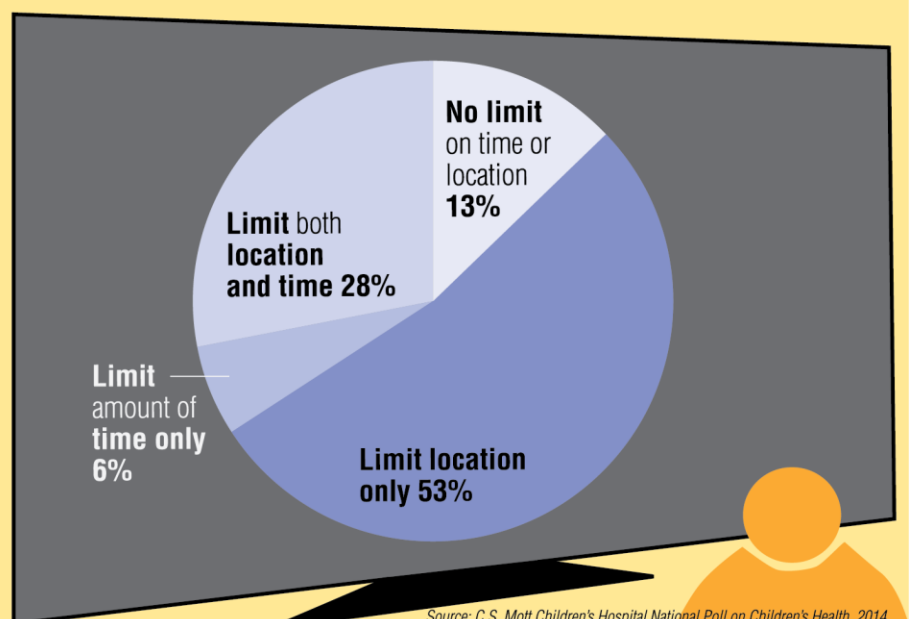
### Household Habits for Young Children's Screen Time

About one-half (53%) of parents of young children limit the locations where children can use media devices (i.e., not in their bedrooms or at mealtimes). Only 6% of parents report limiting the amount of screen time for their children by setting daily limits, having days when no screen time is allowed or having screen-free days for the whole family. About one-quarter (28%) of parents report having a combination of location limits and time limits. In one out of every eight households with young children (13%), parents do not limit entertainment screen time or locations (Figure 1).

### Contact us

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit.

Figure 1. Parents' Rules for Screen Time for Young Children



*This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in March 2014 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. Responses from parents with a child age 1-5 (n=560) were used for this report. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 53% among the parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 3 to 5 percentage points and higher among subgroups.*

Parents' views about reasonable screen time differ by the age of their children, and do not necessarily match the AAP recommendations. The AAP recommends that parents should discourage entertainment screen time for all children under two years old and limit children's entertainment screen time to less than two hours per day. Among parents of children younger than two years old, only 12% think that no entertainment screen time is reasonable. In contrast, among parents of children 2-5 years old, 88% say that two hours or less of entertainment screen time is reasonable each day.

However, about 1 in 4 parents (26%) of children 2-5 years old report average daily entertainment screen time of three or more hours for their young children. Among these parents, 35% say they have not considered limiting total screen time each day, 24% say they have not set screen-free times for the whole family, and 19% say they have not set screen-free days for their children.

### **Implications**

In today's media environment, new devices are emerging and evolving quickly. Parents face fresh challenges in managing young children's entertainment screen time. This poll has found that most parents agree with recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics for entertainment screen time limits for young children. However, many parents struggle with putting these limits into practice.

More parental education in this case is not necessarily the answer. Children's healthcare providers should seek to understand and troubleshoot obstacles that young patients' families are facing regarding screen time. The most common approach parents currently use is to limit locations where screen time is allowed, which may indicate that limiting location is more practical than limiting screen time. In fact, about one-third of parents whose young children have high amounts of screen time say they have previously tried screen-free times for their families but are no longer following this strategy.

Importantly, the national conversation about children and screen time is expanding to include quality as well as quantity. Therefore, in addition to helping families address barriers to minimizing screen time, future efforts must concentrate on how media sectors concerned with children's healthy development can work together to produce and promote higher quality screen-based experiences. This is an important next stage, because there is growing evidence that how young children interact with screen media is at least as important as how much time they spend.

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