

## **INFORMATION FOR PARENTS**

Canadian children and adolescents are now spending so much time on screens – video games, smartphones, tablets, computers and television, public health and pediatric experts report that it is negatively impacting their physical, mental and social health.

**Recreational Screen time** recommendations as outlined by the Canadian guidelines and endorsed by the Canadian Pediatric Society:

Under 2 years – no screen time

2 - 4 year olds – 1 Hour daily maximum; less is better

5 - 17 year olds – 2 Hour daily maximum; less is better

We have seen a dramatic shift in the way children spend their time, with less time playing outside and more time spent indoors, sedentary and screen-based.

A growing body of research is sounding the alarm about the amount of time Canadian children and youth are spending sitting in front of screens, this is negatively associated with their physical, mental and emotional health.

The Ontario Student Health survey reports that students in grades 7 to 12 are spending up to 7 hours a day on screens, more than *three and a half times the recommended limit of 2 hours per day*. (The survey results would be very similar in Alberta)

Spending so much time on smartphones, video games, tablets, computers and televisions significantly affects eating habits, displaces physical activities, limits children's opportunities to interact with each other, and increases the incidence of mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

Simultaneously, researchers agree that spending time in nature and being active outdoors is beneficial to children's physical and mental health, and helps improve their resiliency, academic performance and social skills.

Physicians in Scotland, America and Canada have started prescribing time in nature, which can reduce symptoms of stress, depression, anxiety, aggression, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), diabetes and high blood pressure, and improve cognition and immune function.

Children and youth aged 5 - 17 years should engage in high levels of physical activity, reduced levels of sedentary behavior - especially screen time - and sufficient sleep each day. 85% of children aged 5-17 do not meet the guidelines

for adequate sleep, physical activity and screen time.

Physical activity is closely linked to a child's physiological health, cognitive function and mental health. A team of experts in pediatric neuroscience and exercise science emphasize the positive benefit of aerobic exercise on brain health.

For example, physical activity improves cognitive functions such as behavior regulation, attention and planning, and improves mental health. Physical activity in children helps minimize depressive symptoms and feelings of anxiety.

In addition, higher levels of physical activity in children are associated with lower stress and better resilience. Developing healthy exercise habits in childhood and adolescence can set the foundation for a lifetime of good physical and mental health.

The New Year is an optimal time to review and discuss the information with your children.

FROM YOUR SCHOOL NURSE.