

6 Tips for a balanced media “diet”

The things our children observe in the media has a huge influence on them—its kind of like a mega-peer group. Whether it’s television, online or in the news, children absorb information and develop a sense of what is normal, desirable or “in”.

It’s important to ensure a healthy balance between their exposure to media and interacting with family and friends to aid in their physical, emotional and social development.

1. **KEEP MEAL TIMES MEDIA FREE:** To build a healthy connected family, set a rule that there is no media on during family meals. Turn off the TV and don’t allow smartphones or iPads at the table (this includes parents!). When you allow media during meals there is immediately a disconnection, a distraction. You are not giving each other or your meal your full attention. Encourage conversation.
2. **BE INVOLVED:** Join in! Play, watch and listen with your children. Discuss issues with them and encourage critical thinking. Look at what they are looking at and get them talking rather than consuming media passively. Plan activities and then do the one activity such as play one game or watch a show and then turn it off.
3. **QUESTION:** Make sure your children understand that what they may read online may not be the truth but just opinion. Discuss issues with them and encourage them to question and analyse the messages in the media.
4. **VALUES:** The messages your child is absorbing from media sources may not be in line with your own family values. Observe and if necessary moderate so that you can help them to make better choices. Help them to learn responsible behaviour by modelling great media behaviour yourself.
5. **SET AGE APPROPRIATE TIME LIMITS:** Consider the time your child is in front of a screen whether computer, tablet device or television and set time limits. One or two hours a day is ample for a primary aged child. Ensure rules you set are manageable.
6. **KEEP A LOG:** It can be pretty confronting but by keeping a log you will be able see just how balanced your child’s media diet really is. List all screen time, outside play, sport, time spent with friends and family (without media), indoor play and reading then help your child to make wise choices with their allocated screen time.

