

Screens, Mental Health and Sleep

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What are we talking about today?

- Screens– phones, tablets, computers (TVs?)
- The impact on child and adolescent mental health, child development, and sleep
 - Not a digital expert
 - Not the ways and means of controlling the content
 - Not internet safety eg stranger danger

What are we talking about?

It's a whole new world

Some of it is great
and wonderful



Screens can bring
out the worst in us –
bullying, abuse,
addiction

Screens can bring out the
best in us eg creativity,
social connections

Some of it is dangerous or
damaging

Like in the real world – kids need our supervision, guidance and boundaries

They need these things... They don't want them....

What are we talking about?

- There are no simple answers
- Need to think about the complex interaction between
 - Screens in general
 - What they are being used for
 - For how long
 - The individual child
 - The tasks of childhood and adolescence
 - The context – the family; the school

A time of uncertainty....

- There has been an exponential growth in screens and phones over the last 40 years (especially last 20 years)
- We are only beginning to know what effect this will have on us and CYP
- Few restrictions on content; contradictory advice
- May look back on this time as the wild west of technology
- Law makers/ parents/ clinicians are playing catch up with the “digital natives” CYP

A time of uncertainty???

Two sides to the story....

- The BMJ – Aug 2015 – The debate over digital technology and young people
- The Guardian – Dec 2016 – Toxic childhood
- Reports by RCPCH and CMO – Inconclusive evidence (Jan/ Feb 2019)

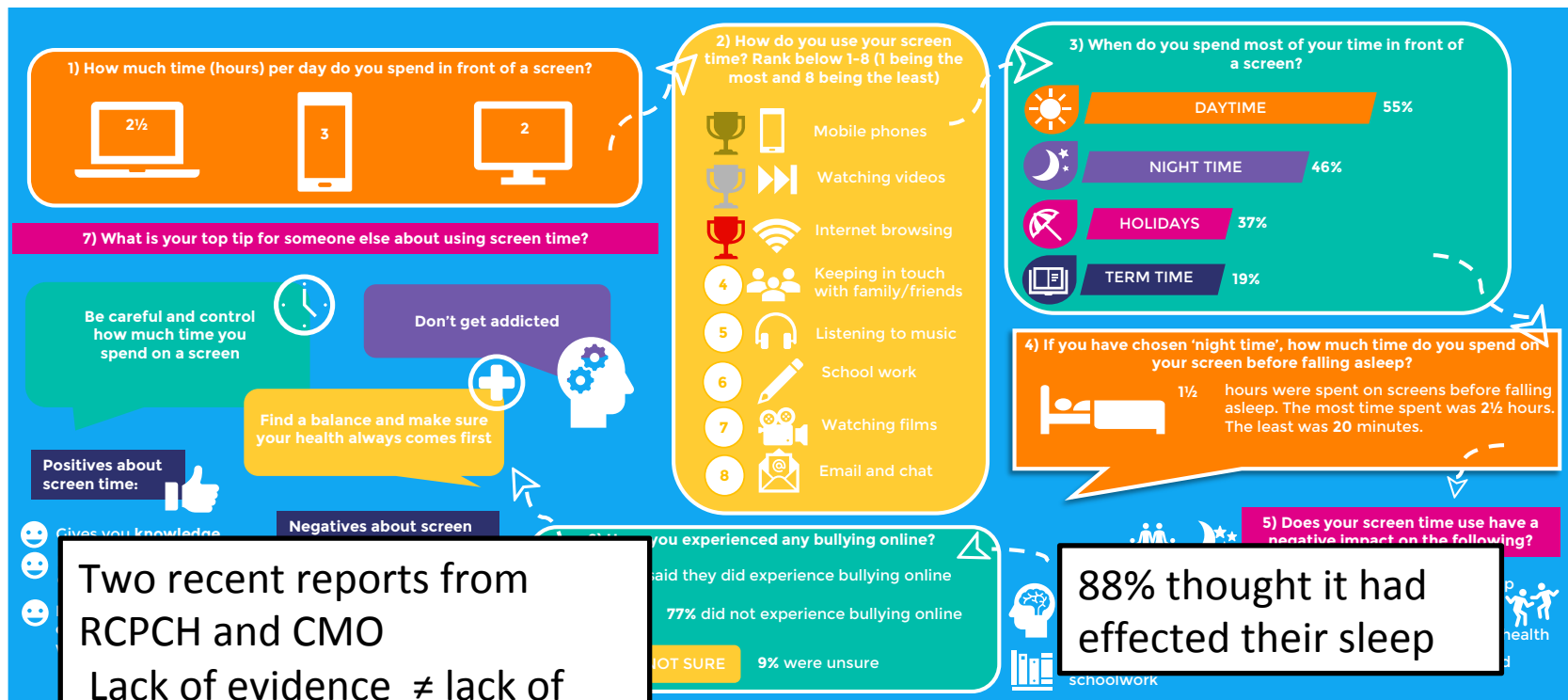
Screens and social media could be damaging to CYP's mental health and development (self esteem; addiction; attention; body image). We need to act

VS

There is no definitive evidence that screens and social media are causal. We need more research

A time of uncertainty???

What do children and young people think about screen time?



Two recent reports from RCPCH and CMO
Lack of evidence ≠ lack of causality

by UK intern Rez, age 17, during her summer internship with RCPCH & Us | August 2018
RCPCH & Us is a registered charity in England and Wales (1057744) and in Scotland (SCO38299)

Chief Medical Officer

- Not using phones and mobile devices at the dinner table - talking as a family is very important for development
- Keeping screens out of the bedroom at bedtime
- Talking as a family about keeping safe online and about cyber-bulling and what children should do if they are worried
- Not using phones when crossing a road or doing any other activity that requires a person's full attention
- Making sure children take a break from screens every two hours by getting up and being active
- Policing their own use too - parents proper attention and quality family time they are happy for pictures to be shared

Level of proof required as a CMO to offer definitive advice is high.

A time of uncertainty??? Or a tipping point?



Often actual evidence lags behind clinical observation

A time of uncertainty? Or tipping point?

- Mental health crisis amongst children and Young People (CYP)
 - Presentations at A&E almost doubled between 2009-2014
 - 20-25% of 14 year olds are self harming
- My observations: internet and screen based difficulties seem to impact on the mental health of the young people in clinic
- What is the nature of that relationship
 - Causal?
 - Triggering?
 - Intensifying and amplifying?

A time of uncertainty? Or tipping point?

“Really intensive social media (4-5 hours a day) is linked to lower well being and mental ill health amplifies those and makes them into an echo chamber”

– Richard Crellin (29/8/2018) Children’s Society

Screens and Mental Health

What are the main issues?

What are the main issues?

- TIME



What are the main issues?

PRIVACY and EXPOSURE



What are the main issues?

AMOUNT and AVAILABILITY



What are the main issues?

Addiction and persuasive design

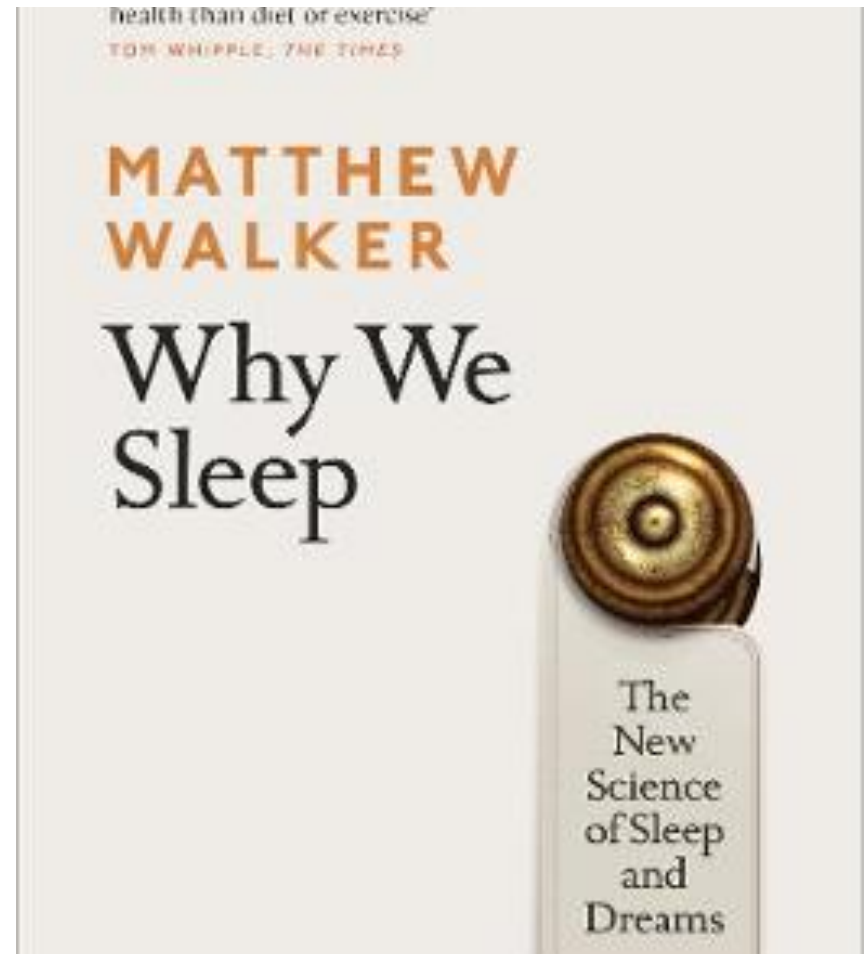


What does this mean for child and adolescent mental health?

- More screens means less time engaging in sports, physical activity and outside (all of which are associated with good mental health)
- More private screen watching means less sense of family connection (protective for mental health)
- Content not supervised by you or mediated by you (protective for mental health)
- Stimulation and blue light associated with poor sleep
- All of these devices designed for short attention spans, and to be addictive (partial reinforcement schedule; short term gratification)
- More screen time associated with poorer GCSES (extra hour = 2 fewer grades)
- Reducing screen time associated with lowering BMI (reducing energy intake)

The nature of sleep

- Periods of REM (mind) and non- REM (body) sleep
- Sleep window
- Circadian rhythms – algae, plants, animals and all human cells
- Teens typically need 9 hours of sleep



What are the issues with sleep and screens

1. Devices in the bedrooms
2. Blue light and Circadian rhythms
3. Addiction and persuasive design
4. Not going to bed
 - 9pm 15% of 11-15s are still communicating via social media, and 2% are still messaging at midnight. (Ofcom 2016)
5. Stimulation

Devices

- Studies often make a distinction between
 - TV and video (watching)
 - Computer use (browsing internet; gaming)
 - Video games and consoles (playing)
 - Smartphones (social media; communication)
- Pre adolescents and adolescents on average have 4 devices in their room

Devices

- Number of devices inversely related to delayed bedtimes, shorter sleep duration, increased bedtime resistance, and higher level of sleep disturbance
- Gender differences in use of devices F: social media; M: consoles and gaming
- Often on more than one device

Blue light

- Present in TV/ tablets/ laptops
- Issue with modern devices is that they are close to face
- Change the release of melatonin which kick starts sleepiness
- Confuses the circadian rhythms
- Miss your sleep window
- Blue light filters on mobiles

Addictive or persuasive design

- Evidence of Dopamine involvement with phone use
- 59% of adults describe themselves hooked on their smartphones
- Sigman argues that because children's brains are malleable screen use changes neural pathways and brain structures to create a future susceptibility to addiction.

Addictive or persuasive design

- “It would defy common sense to argue that [high levels] of [iPhone] usage, by children whose brains are still developing, is not having at least some impact....It is also no secret that social media sites and applications for which the iPhone and iPad are a primary gateway are usually designed to be as addictive and time-consuming as possible.”
- Leading investors in Apple in a letter to the board
- Perhaps to avoid future law suits?

Minecraft – progressing “up” the gaming tree?

- Entry level: Single player off line “creative” – like on screen lego.
- Moderate level: “Survival” mode – more scary
- Online: With others in your wifi (eg 2 friends playing together) or via an external server with players all around the world.
- Linked to YouTube videos – watching others play minecraft; adult humour
- Likely to have benefits: Hand eye co-ordination; creativity; spatial awareness
- However, most parents find its like crack cocaine for kids...

Video- game addiction...

- Something you are unlikely to hear: “Mum I’m just getting off minecraft now to play outside/ read a book/ play with my friend”
- What do we mean by addictive? withdrawing from social or other activities; getting in the way of eating, studying, normal life; experiencing mood disturbance when denied it; lying; using it to escape feelings.

Watching alone

- Its very different watching something on our own compared to round a family TV - physical contact; family connection; chance to discuss; share values; reassure anxieties; turn off.
- Isolating event – psychologically teenagers are egocentric - get sucked into their solitary drama.
- When other teenagers are the only influence; they feed off each other and can replicate and increase the drama exponentially

What are the issues with sleep and screens – eg Netflix

1. Devices in the bedrooms- watching alone, not with family ; multiple devices on the go at once
2. Blue light and Circadian rhythms – close to face; miss sleep window.
3. Addiction and persuasive design – one episode follows next
4. Stimulation – maybe upsetting, exciting, thought provoking
5. Not going to bed

Watching

- 13 Reasons to Die/ To the bone – on Netflix
 - by the time the schools and parents knew about it, all the teenagers had watched it
 - Damaging because it gave method of suicide; scary and upsetting; but also gave a narrative about suicide which is appealing to teenagers
- Porn
 - Range; choice; frequency; appropriateness makes it damaging.
 - Boys learning about sex from porn is like them leaning about how to drive a car by watching Top Gear

Social media

- Concerned about what impact this is having on young girls
 - Amplifying girl drama – escalates as they get tired
 - Sharing self harm
 - Obsession with food, fitness and fashion

Standard selfie image

- Cheeks sucked in
- Lips puckered;
- Taken from above (ok to have a big head)
- Breasts further forward than hips and thighs (learning about perspective)
- Thighs falling down if possible
- Self sexualisation of children and young girls



Snapchat Beauty filter

Before



After



Stimulation

- Often emotionally stimulating content
 - Scary
 - Adrenaline
 - Information overload
 - Upsetting
 - Triggering
 - Girl drama
 - Wired
 - FOMO or Hurt at missing out



Computers - Homework

- Very difficult to access the right information at a developmentally appropriate level
- In my opinion, teachers should give weblinks
- Some great stuff out there for learning
- But if kids are online or on computers doing homework they will be constantly tempted and/or interrupted by social media/ gaming

“ I worry that the level of interrupt, the sort of overwhelming rapidity of information... is in fact affecting cognition. It is affecting deeper thinking. I still believe that sitting down and reading a book is the best way to really learn something. And I worry that we are losing that.”

Eric Schmidt when he was CEO / Chair
of Google

What do digital experts want for their kids?

- <https://youtu.be/fUxLKik3zNA>

What can we do?

Four things (Ofcom 2016)

- Talking to their children
- Rules
- Supervision
- Technical devices

What can adults do? Talking

- Talking about it mediates some of the risks
- Helping them to think about it and make smart decisions with porn; friendships; appearance; viewing habits
- Name to tame
- Maintain a framework and structure which encourages OFF screen time eg eating together; time outside; and other activities

What can we do? - Rules

Encourage parents to set boundaries and expectations with their kids BEFORE they get a phone/ laptop – a contract

1. Screens as a gift – kids will take it for granted
2. Screen as a responsibility – no narcissism; bullying; nudity; strangers; unkindness; consumerism; self obsession.
3. Screen isn't good for you – Not checking or posting constantly; total daily limits; shouldn't interrupt RL

What we can do? Rules

- Discussion: Is there a role for schools for helping parents set boundaries around phones and screens?
- As a camden parent invited to SRE talk with teacher, should we have a screen talk in a similar way?

What can parents do? - Supervision

- Make it a condition of having the device that they help them use it sensibly (ie monitor their use):
- This is not reading their diary
- This is checking who they are hanging out with and what they are doing
- This is giving them guidance in a wild west world
- But also helping them keep their values and boundaries

What can parents do? Access and Technical

- Set boundaries about a child having a laptop or phone in their bedroom – 1 in 10 (11-15 yr olds) are on social media at 10pm
- If they have a desktop make sure it is time and content limited. Turn off the wifi at night.
- Use apps (eg Our Pact; screen limit) ; passcodes; parental controls; extension networks; circle.
- Limit their 3 or 4G on their smartphone.
- Not be scared (of the rows, of being mean) to take it all away if they infringe the rules

In summary

- Kids need boundaries and guidance
- Can teachers and schools support parents to do this?
- Think about
 - The amount of time
 - The content
 - The exposure and privacy
 - Addictive