

TEENS & SCREENS – WHEN TO LIGHTEN UP, WHEN TO WORRY

The holidays offered adolescents a much-needed break from school demands and hours of required online classes, which can be overwhelming. The New Year brings an ideal opportunity for a post-holiday [reset of habits and attitudes](#).

EXPERTS SUGGEST ...

Lighten up -- Because their devices are their [primary way of staying connected](#) to each other, kids need the freedom to spend non-school time on screens for socializing, video games, entertainment, etc. Try to let them set their own [limits on use](#), unless they seem unable to shut down their devices, especially at night. Strategies like [grayscale](#) and “do not disturb” can help limit phone distractions.

When to worry -- It’s less about the amount of time spent online than about what excessive screen time may keep kids from NOT doing – are sleep, diet, exercise, interactions with family suffering? If students are not tuning into classes or keeping up with schoolwork, or if caregivers notice dramatic personality changes, overt anxiety, [signs of depression](#), etc., reach out to a [dean, counselor, or social worker](#) for guidance or seek [professional mental health care](#).

SCREEN TIME & HEALTHY HABITS DURING THE SCHOOL WEEK

- **Move!** Even when you’re onscreen for back to back zooming, make sure you periodically stand, stretch, flex and release muscles to keep circulation going.
- **Breathe** – a few deep breaths can help refocus energy and concentration.
- Always have a glass of **water** on hand to stay hydrated.
- Take time to **eat healthy** foods that can help keep the body energized – fruits, nuts
- Whenever you can, **take a break** from screen use to do something else...
 - Go **outside** – even a quick walk around the block has enormous recharging benefits.
 - Work a puzzle or play a quick **game** with someone in your household. Games like Solitaire, Set, and Boggle can even be fun and stimulating played alone.
 - **Make something**, knit, draw, cook...
 - **Exercise** – yoga, dance, shooting hoops, running, biking...
 - Instead of texting, initiate an actual phone **conversation**.
 - **Close your eyes and savor a quiet moment**.
- Eat at least one **meal together** as a family – without devices present.
- **Sleep** – regular times for going to bed and waking will make falling and staying asleep easier and more beneficial. Consider keeping devices OUT of the bedroom.

If you are really concerned about your teen’s mental health, don’t hesitate to reach out. BHS social workers Mary Minott (mary_minott@psbma.org) and Abby Dean (gabrielle_dean@psbma.org) can help with information, advice, and resources.

More information can be found at www.B-PEN.org.

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