

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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Help Improve Your Child's Health by Setting Limits

Many children received video games, cell phones, TVs or computers as Christmas gifts this year. Kids really enjoy these gifts and can and will spend endless hours with them if no limits are set. Children between eight and eighteen years of age spend an average of 44.5 hours a week using electronic media and only 8.75 hours in physical activity. For many youth, this has resulted in becoming overweight.

In addition to increasing the risk of becoming overweight, too much use of media can result in less homework being completed, less time spent reading, lower metabolic rates, less physical activity and reduced time playing with friends. Too much screen time can also lead to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, joint disorders, depression, hypertension and sleep problems. A preschoolers' risk for obesity increases six percent for every hour of TV watched per day. Research has shown that reducing the amount of time a preschooler watches TV will lower their body weight as well.

It is up to parents to set limits on electronic media. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children two years of age and younger and no more than one hour of total screen time per day for children ages three to twelve years. Keep these recommendations in mind: limit computer usage in a child's room, do not put a TV in a child's room, don't allow media use during homework and meal times, promote physical activities, regularly eat family meals together, set a regular bedtime, limit screen time for all family members and be a good role model for your kids.

It is important to encourage children to get at least sixty minutes of moderate or intense aerobic physical activity each day. Playing outside with friends can help accomplish that goal. Exercise can lower blood pressure, increase bone strength, improve mood, reduce depression, lessen stress and reduce weight.

When your child asks for a video or computer game, keep the following tips in mind when selecting one. Review the video game rating. M is not for anyone under seventeen years of age; E is supposed to be for everyone but many E rated games reward players for harming other characters and is not recommended for children; E10+ may be suitable for everyone ten and older-expect some violence, abusive language and suggestive themes; T is for teens (age thirteen and older)-again expect violence, suggestive themes, crude humor or strong language; ONLINE, although rated, can change in content based on the people who are playing online with your child.

When helping your child pick a video game keep in mind that there are healthy, helpful video games for all ages that will encourage physical activity, reward helpful and healthy actions, that can improve skills such as reading, spelling, rhythmic movement, typing, balance, flexibility and hand eye coordination. Video games include sports, puzzles, problem-solving and traditional educational subjects. To learn more about the Do's and Don'ts of electronic media, contact the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.