

I'm constantly told to worry about my child's screen time – but I'm more concerned about my own

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. How much time do you spend looking at a screen every day? (It can be your computer, mobile devices, TV, etc.)
2. How much time did you spend looking at screens as a child?
3. What factors have contributed to increased screen time in the past decades?

2 Key words

a. Match the words with their definitions. All the words appear in the article.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. absent-mindedly _____ | a. bright, shining |
| 2. afford _____ | b. suitable for humans to breathe |
| 3. breathable _____ | c. take a brief, quick look |
| 4. embrace _____ | d. move text or graphics on a screen in a particular direction in order to see different parts of it |
| 5. flicking _____ | e. have enough money to pay for something |
| 6. gist _____ | f. someone who is not behaving sensibly and is doing something dangerous |
| 7. glance _____ | g. accept or support with enthusiasm |
| 8. glowing _____ | h. without paying much attention to what you are doing |
| 9. maniac _____ | i. the main point or the general meaning of a piece of writing or speech |
| 10. scroll _____ | j. moving from one screen to another |

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b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences. You may need to change the form of the word.

1. She _____ at her watch and realised it was too late.
2. Do you often _____ your phone while watching TV?
3. I'd love to buy a new smartphone, but unfortunately, I can't _____ it right now.
4. I know you've always _____ challenges and new opportunities.
5. I got the _____ of the presentation, but I can't remember the details, to be honest.
6. I saw her _____ through the pages of a magazine this morning.

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James Colley

6 June, 2024

- 1 The primary task of all parents is to worry. You have a thousand things to worry about across the course of the day, all the way from “What’s that in their mouth?” to “How am I going to get this cleaning done?”
- 2 Once we are done with the immediate worries, we have the joy of worrying about things entirely out of our control, from whether they will be a good person to whether they will have a breathable atmosphere. Of all of these, one of the topics most talked about and stressed about is screen time. Every time my child glances at a screen, I start to panic. I try to calm myself by remembering how I was raised on television and turned out fine. Then I realise that I work in television, believe television to be very important, and have absolutely not “turned out fine”.
- 3 All of a sudden, I find myself questioning my own screen time. I justify my time on screens, believing it is important for my work. Every so often, I take a little break to scroll on the small glowing rectangle. Then, after a hard day, I sit on the sofa and stare at the biggest glowing rectangle I can afford. This is called living life to its fullest.
- 4 The way we measure time spent on our phone is similar to watching other cars on the motorway: anyone going slower than you is a fool; anyone going faster than you is a maniac. In the same way, anyone who watches more television than me, or scrolls for longer, has a terrible and sad addiction. Anyone who does it less than me is afraid to embrace the new world.
- 5 Really, there are times when every minute of my screen time should count as two because I’m actually looking at a second screen on my phone. Then there’s the third screen, from the laptop I am absent-mindedly typing away on. Honestly, it’s four – I just checked my smartwatch to see some notifications.
- 6 I have even caught myself repeatedly checking a second screen while watching a programme made in a foreign language. I will check my phone, miss all the subtitles, and listen to characters speak a language I do not know, confident that I am still getting the gist of what is going on.
- 7 We must also wonder what is being lost with these distractions. I have heard that one of the real losses from all this distracted living is the ability to sit with a difficult thought or feeling. That is an essential quality both if you wish to create art and if you wish to be a complete human being. So, how do I reclaim my lost attention span? Have we just found another thing to feel guilty about for no real reason?
- 8 These are difficult questions and require a real commitment to be able to answer. Unfortunately, I am already distracted. I’ve begun flicking through my phone, and when that is done, I might watch a couple of minutes of the football game on the television, then it’s time for another scroll to see what people are saying about the game, and so on, and so on.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Choose the correct option to complete the sentences.

1. Parents are often concerned **only about immediate matters / about things that give children joy / about things they cannot control.**
2. Parents generally **don't pay much attention to / are stressed about / are unnecessarily worried about** how much screen time their children get.
3. The author recently started questioning **how much time he spends on screens / if screen time is a real issue / whether he is living his life to the fullest.**
4. According to the author, **distracted living / trying to become complete human beings / feeling guilty** has resulted in being unable to handle difficult situations.
5. He would like to **understand people speaking foreign languages / stop using multiple screens at work / be able to concentrate better.**
6. The author cannot answer the important questions he asked because he constantly **gets distracted / watches football games on TV / likes to know what other people are saying.**

4 Key language

a. The following linking words and phrases appear in the article. Match each to their meanings.

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. all of a sudden | a. sadly |
| 2. every so often | b. similarly |
| 3. then | c. later |
| 4. in the same way | d. in fact |
| 5. really | e. therefore |
| 6. so | f. suddenly |
| 7. unfortunately | g. occasionally |

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b. Complete the sentences using linking words and phrases a to g from task a.

1. I was walking to work when I _____ remembered I had forgotten my phone.
2. I loved the show. _____ I think it's the best one I've seen in a long time.
3. _____, the concert was cancelled due to the storm.
4. Many people use their phones for social media. _____, a large number of users rely on their devices for entertainment.
5. They watched a film and _____ played some online games.
6. He missed the bus because he was looking at his phone. _____, he was late for work.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

1. 'The primary task of all parents is to worry.'
2. 'Screen time is one of the topics most talked about and stressed about.'
3. 'The way we measure time spent on our phone is similar to watching other cars on the motorway: anyone going slower than you is a fool; anyone going faster than you is a maniac. In the same way, anyone who watches more television than me, or scrolls for longer, has a terrible and sad addiction. Anyone who does it less than me is afraid to embrace the new world.'
4. 'One of the real losses from all this distracted living is the ability to sit with a difficult thought or feeling.'

6 In your own words

- a. In pairs or small groups, research online and prepare a presentation about the potential dangers of excessive screen time. Think of some strategies to manage screen time more effectively. Then, present your ideas to the class.