# Should government influence how much screen-time you use?



As technology increasingly intertwines with daily life, the impact of screen time on mental health has become a critical area of concern. Screens, which facilitate communication, education, and entertainment, are now pervasive, especially among younger generations. However, mounting evidence signals that excessive screen usage may be linked to troubling trends in mental health, including heightened anxiety, depression, and disrupted sleep patterns.

Screen time is a broad concept, encompassing diverse activities such as gaming, social media engagement, video streaming, and even work-related use of electronic devices. According to a report by Common Sense Media, teenagers spend over seven hours daily on screens for entertainment alone, not accounting for educational use. This considerable exposure often encroaches on time typically allotted for physical exercise, face-to-face socialising, and adequate sleep—each crucial to maintaining mental wellness.

Studies conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reinforce these concerns. Their research highlights that teenagers with higher daily non-school screen time are more prone to infrequent physical activity, irregular sleep, weight concerns, and symptoms of anxiety and depression. Another research paper points to a daily threshold of four or more hours on screens as significantly increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, behavioural problems, and conditions like ADHD among children and adolescents. The disruption of healthy sleep routines and reduced physical activity partly mediates this relationship, suggesting that interventions fostering more balanced lifestyles could mitigate mental health risks.

Social media, one of the primary facets of screen time, plays a complex role in mental health. While these platforms facilitate connection and community, they simultaneously cultivate environments prone to toxicity, cyberbullying, and emotional distress. Exposure to curated images and lifestyles often leads to unrealistic comparisons, intensifying feelings of inadequacy and isolation. Such experiences contribute to increased vulnerability to long-lasting emotional difficulties. Experts stress the importance of guiding young people in navigating social media responsibly, promoting positive engagement, and disengagement from harmful content.

Amid the growing evidence, some governments have begun taking legislative measures. In September 2024, California enacted a law requiring schools to limit or ban smartphone use, aiming to curb mental health problems associated with excessive phone use, including anxiety and depression among students. This follows similar initiatives by other states, underscoring a concerted effort to address digital overexposure in educational settings. Similarly, France has proposed stringent recommendations to restrict smartphone and social media access for children and teenagers, such as prohibiting internet-enabled smartphones for those under 13 and banning social media for under 15s, to safeguard youth well-being.

Managing screen time effectively emerges as a vital approach to promoting mental health. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises strict limits on screen use for young children and endorses tech-free zones at home to encourage healthier habits. Introducing alternatives like outdoor activities or hobbies not only diversifies experiences but also supports positive social interactions. These strategies help reduce the potential angst and mental health challenges linked to sustained screen engagement.

For individuals struggling despite these preventative steps, accessing mental health services remains essential. According to professionals from mental health organisations like Sierra Meadows, tailored therapeutic interventions can provide crucial support for those experiencing anxiety, depression, or other mental health concerns. Increasing public awareness about the effects of excessive screen time encourages timely conversations and directs people towards valuable resources.

Looking ahead, society’s relationship with technology and screen use will continue to evolve, necessitating ongoing research and open dialogue about mental health implications. Innovations such as wellness apps designed to encourage mindful screen use and telehealth therapy sessions demonstrate the potential for technology to support mental well-being rather than undermine it. These developments underscore a crucial point: technology, when managed thoughtfully, can enhance rather than detract from the human experience.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://techbullion.com/screen-time-and-its-impact-on-mental-health/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2025/24_0537.htm> - A study published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) examines the associations between screen time use and health outcomes among US teenagers. The research indicates that teenagers with higher non-schoolwork daily screen time are more likely to experience adverse health outcomes, including infrequent physical activity, weight concerns, depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and irregular sleep routines. The study highlights the need for further investigation into the underlying mechanisms of these associations and the content viewed on screens.
3. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2508.10062> - This research paper explores the relationship between excessive screen time and mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, behavior or conduct problems, and ADHD among US children and adolescents. The study finds that daily screen time of four hours or more is linked to higher risks of these mental health issues. It also identifies physical activity, irregular bedtime, and short sleep duration as mediators in this association, suggesting that interventions promoting physical activity and regular sleep routines may mitigate these problems.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/california-passes-law-ban-or-restrict-smartphones-school-2024-09-24/> - In September 2024, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed legislation requiring schools to limit or ban smartphone use, addressing concerns about mental health and learning impairments associated with excessive use. This law follows similar actions by thirteen other states, beginning with Florida in 2023. The bill mandates school boards to develop policies restricting smartphone use by July 1, 2026, and to revise these policies every five years, aiming to mitigate smartphone-related anxiety and depression among students.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-must-curb-child-teen-use-smartphones-social-media-says-panel-2024-04-30/> - An expert panel commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron recommends limiting smartphone and social media use for children and teenagers to address negative impacts. The panel suggests that children under 11 should not have cellphones, those under 13 should not access smartphones with internet capabilities, and social media use should be prohibited for anyone under 15. These recommendations aim to protect children's physical, emotional, and mental well-being in the short, medium, and long term.
6. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db513.htm> - A data brief from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) presents statistics on the percentage of teenagers who had symptoms of anxiety or depression in the past two weeks, stratified by daily screen time. The brief reveals that teenagers with four or more hours of daily screen time are more likely to experience anxiety and depression symptoms compared to those with less than four hours of daily screen time, highlighting the association between excessive screen time and mental health issues.