MANAGING SCREEN TIME AT HOME:

One of the main questions I am often asked, concerns the amount of screen time that children have and how to manage it at home in a peaceful and positive way. The points below will hopefully offer some strategies that will ensure that there is some form of balance and that the children themselves take responsibility and are involved in the entire process.

It is also important to add, that we as parents, are role models and our children may be influenced by our own actions. If we do not show them how to have restraint, then it is obviously difficult for them to understand and adhere to the rules / conditions that we create.

If your children are locked to their devices on the weekend, then it is up to us to create alternate activities which will form the balance so needed for personal well-being and social interaction that is declining at an alarming rate.

Plan daily tech-free activities, especially during the holidays, where children are engaged in physical activity. Children more than ever, need 'green time', time in nature, so ensure they have plenty of time outdoors. This helps with their self-regulation skills, eye health, mental well-being and also helps to regulate their circadian rhythms which assists their sleep. It is all about balance!

- Walk the dog together
- Explore a new playground / park together
- Have a kick on the local reserve together
- Join a club
- Develop a new hobby together
- Start a backyard project together
- Cook some treats together
- Run along a beach together
- Play some board games together in the evening
- Go for a bike ride together
- Watch a favourite movie together with popcorn too!!!!

Often attraction to devices overcomes boredom and sometimes loneliness, even in adults.

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PLAN DON'T BAN!
Establish firm rules about what, when, where, with whom and how much time your child can spend with screens. Do this in consultation with your child and set realistic and achievable limits for best results.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Find high-quality, age-appropriate content. What your child does with technology is more critical than obsessing over 'how much' time they spend plugged-in. Is it leisure or learning? Are they active or passive? Is it age appropriate? The Australian Council on Children and the Media, have some great review tools (**movie reviews** and **app reviews**), as do **Common Sense Media** (who review apps, games, websites, movies).

USE INTERNET FILTERS

Filtering software is great to ensure kids aren't accessing inappropriate content when you're not around to physically supervise them. **The Family Zone**, for example, allows you to restrict what content kids can download and access on devices, but it also helps to enforce limits on the amount of time kids can access and when they can use devices (this is especially helpful for working parents, or for kids who have their 'own' devices).

ESTABLISH TECH-FREE ZONES AT HOME

Ideally, kids should use screens in publicly-accessible parts of the house like the kitchen or dining room. A recommendation is that bedrooms, bathrooms, meal zones and play areas should be tech-free.

ESTABLISH CUT OFF POINTS OR TIME

Rather than prescribing an amount of 'screen time', give kids precise quantities and clear cut-off points. For example, tell them: "You can play two NBA games" or "You can watch two episodes of your favourite show on Netflix".

PRIME TO PREVENT

Give kids and teens ample warnings before their screen-time will end. This is called 'cognitive priming' and these simple verbal reminders allow kids to prepare themselves for the end of screen-time. This can prevent the dreaded techno-tantrum.

AVOID DIGITAL STICKS AND CARROTS

Try to avoid using screen-time as a reward or punishment tool. Using screen-time as a 'digital carrot' to reward good behaviour, or for completing chores (or to threaten children for inappropriate behaviour) only works in the short-term and can have negative long-term consequences. (For example, we know kids are unlikely to report cyber-bullying to parents if there's a threat of 'digital amputation').

HOWEVER… if your children have completed their agreed home /school commitments, you may feel it is possible for them to have some screen time. This should always be seen as managing their time well and sticking to the agreed plan, rather than being a reward. If the agreed plan falls in a heap and screen time has been withdrawn or reduced, ensure that the child sees this as his doing rather than a punishment.