



Quality Spotlight - Childhood Wellness

HopeHealth's quality focus for July is childhood wellness. This clinical focus includes measures like child safety, childhood weight, activity, and nutrition, immunizations, and the asthma control test and action plan.

Keep reading to learn about managing screen time for kids.

Screen/Life Balance: Screen Time Tips for Families

Jessica Robinson, PA-C

In the digital age, we use screens for work, school, entertainment, connection, and creativity. Screens enhance our lives, but without the balance of active living, too much screen time can affect our physical and mental health. Research indicates that Americans ages eight and older spend an average of seven or more hours a day on phones, computers, tablets, and gaming consoles, which is twice as much as before the COVID-19 pandemic.



Excessive screen time has become a pressing health concern, particularly for children and teens. Too much screen time increases the risk of sleep issues, anxiety, depression, stress, irritability, social isolation, and obesity. Increased screen time for children and teens significantly impairs their learning, focus, task completion, emotion regulation, and the development of social and life skills.

The blue lights and bright colors of screens are extremely addictive, especially for young children, leading to meltdowns when a screen is taken away. If parents use screens as a pacifier, babysitter, punishment, or reward, children do not learn to manage their emotions or social interactions without them. While children and teenagers often struggle with what to do when not on a screen, excessive screen time can also increase impulsivity, reduce self-control, and potentially lead to risky behaviors.

While it may feel impossible in the digital world, limiting screen time in a child's daily life improves cognitive and social development. A guideline for introducing technology based on child development stages is the 3-6-9-12 rule, which promotes healthy cognitive growth. It recommends

no screens before age 3, no personal devices before age 6, no unsupervised internet before age 9, and no social media before age 12.

Many parents become frustrated with a child or teen's behavior when screens are taken away. They may find it easier to give in and allow device use to avoid conflict. What should a parent do if their kids are addicted to screens and their mental or physical health is becoming an issue?

Do your best to set boundaries, strike a balance between firmness and flexibility, and show patience with pushback. In a fast-changing technological landscape, children and teens need support and structure to use screens thoughtfully. Younger children need guidelines and monitoring, with clear limits on the type of programming, frequency, and time on screens. As kids age, they may need more or less supervision, depending on their personality and maturity level.

There is no clear health guideline for screen time. A positive approach involves adding new opportunities to broaden a child or teen's life experiences, rather than bluntly taking screen time away. Be curious about what your kids are watching and doing on screens, have discussions, and develop a supportive environment. Kids will make mistakes, but having an adult they trust to help them will enhance their learning process as they balance living in a digital world.

Developing a plan for media use that includes monitoring and incorporating more fun, wholesome non-screen activities for children and teens can help your family develop healthier media use habits.

Below are some specific tips to implement:

Get the whole family involved. Co-creating a media plan gives kids and teens buy-in. Discuss the "why" behind the plan, such as better sleep, less stress, or more outdoor time. Find out what they are interested in doing instead of screen time, including reading, hobbies, sports, or games.

Simple ways to reduce screen time include setting times for use at home, keeping phones and games in another room overnight, turning off push notifications, curating feeds for positive content, changing phone colors to grayscale mode for less stimulation, and setting a time limit for scrolling or gaming. If kids complain of boredom, remind them that it's a signal to seek new experiences and a springboard to explore other creative outlets.

Analyze your own screen habits. Many adults tend to overuse screens. Adjusting your screen time is one of the most important ways to help kids achieve a better balance. Kids and teens are always watching, and learning to limit your own screen time as a parent will improve your mental health while showing your kids that you're serious about making a positive change.

Set screen-free zones in your home. The bedroom and the dinner table are two screen-free places that can be most helpful for overall health, as the blue light from screens can disrupt sleep. Being off screens and adding wind-down rituals in the hour before bedtime can help the body and mind get ready for sleep. Wind-down rituals can include a warm bath or shower, a cup of tea, lighting candles or dimming lights, reading books, listening to calm music, journaling, drawing, and stretching.

Enjoying meals together as a family without screens helps strengthen connections. Eat at the table, turn off the TV, have a spot for phones, and enjoy light, lively conversation while you eat. Research shows that families who eat together three times a week or more have lower rates of depression, anxiety, and obesity, and higher self-esteem, healthier habits, and better communication skills. Any meal or snack eaten together with at least one parent involved counts. Make it easy with simple meals or weekend brunches, or enjoy a snack or dessert together.

Have fun as a family. Explore family activities to do together, such as games, theme dinners, walks/hikes, bike rides, picnics, movie nights, crafting, gardening, or scavenger hunts. You could also head to a nature park, library, museum, zoo, pool, lake, festival, or farmer's market. Aim for 60 minutes of physical activity daily, such as walking, biking, and playing active games, to promote physical and mental health.

Helps kids learn life skills. Kids could benefit from learning basic screen-free life skills such as cooking, cleaning, organizing, and communicating effectively. Helping kids learn these skills and

assigning weekly chores is also important for learning responsibility. Older kids can also learn life skills through part-time jobs or volunteering to help others.

There has been a clear increase in excessive screen time, with serious associated health issues. In my practice as a pediatric health care practitioner, I have daily discussions with parents and kids/teens about the importance of reducing screen time. Developing a family media plan together with your kids, modeling and teaching digital literacy, and balancing screen time with other activities can help the entire family find a healthier balance and improve overall mental and physical health.

Healthy Huddle Is Tomorrow!



Saturday, July 25 | 10 am
Florence Family YMCA gymnasium | 1700 S. Rutherford Rd., Florence

HopeHealth and the Florence YMCA invite you to join us for an exclusive back-to-school event with SC football quarterback LaNorris Sellers and his brother, SC wide receiver Jayden Sellers! Come enjoy a morning of exercise, autographs, photos, healthy snacks, nutrition tips, and back-to-school supply giveaways! School-aged children must be accompanied by a parent/guardian. The event will take place in the gymnasium.

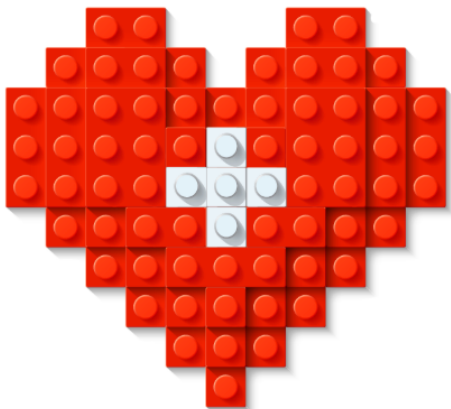
[Click here](#) to view the Facebook event.

Manning Pediatrics Best of Clarendon



Congratulations to HopeHealth Pediatrics in Manning for winning the Sumter Item's Best of Clarendon contest for the fifth year in a row!

**National Health Center Week
Is August 2-8**



HopeHealth will celebrate **National Health Center Week** from August 2-8 with employee appreciation activities, community events, patient resources, and more. National Health Center Week is held every August to bring awareness to the importance of community health centers like HopeHealth. The celebration includes contributions from community health centers throughout the country, highlighting their missions and accomplishments while encouraging support for local centers.

This year's theme is "Building Innovative Care Where It Matters Most." HopeHealth will be emphasizing the importance of people and partnerships in making innovation possible. Employee, patient, and partner activities will be held throughout the week, and employees will be encouraged to take photos and share them with the #NHCW26 hashtag. Support community health centers like HopeHealth by signing up to become an advocate at hcadvocacy.org.

HopeHealth Hosted Brinner with LaNorris and Jayden Sellers



HopeHealth hosted a special evening of food, football talk, and community impact at its third-annual Brinner on June 4 at the Florence Country Club. This breakfast-for-dinner fundraising event featured Gamecock greats LaNorris Sellers, Jayden Sellers, and Tommy Suggs.

Recipe Spotlight

Summer Fruit Salad

This recipe is easy to make with in-season summer produce!

Ingredients:

- 1 medium cantaloupe, deseeded and cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 medium cucumber, peeled and chopped into bite-sized pieces
- ½ cup blueberries
- ¼ cup feta cheese
- 10 medium-to-large basil leaves, chopped
- ½ cup chopped pecans
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 Tbsp lime juice (about 2 limes' worth)



Directions:

- In a medium bowl, add cantaloupe, cucumber, blueberries, feta cheese, and pecans.
- Whisk together olive oil and lime juice, then pour over the salad and toss to coat.
- Refrigerate for 2 hours before serving to allow all flavors to blend.

Tips:

This is a versatile recipe - to change it up, add watermelon, peaches, red onion, or greens!

Visit hope-health.org/community/events to learn about and sign up for free community classes offered by HopeHealth! Topics range from healthy cooking to diabetes management, prioritizing movement, carbohydrate counting, and more.

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5 - Very Satisfied

4 - Satisfied

3 - Neutral

2 - Dissatisfied

1 - Very Dissatisfied

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