Balancing screen time
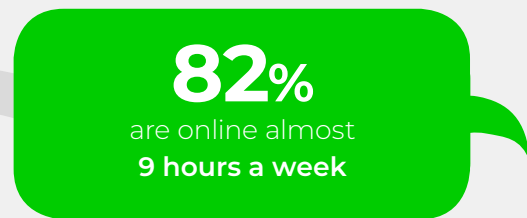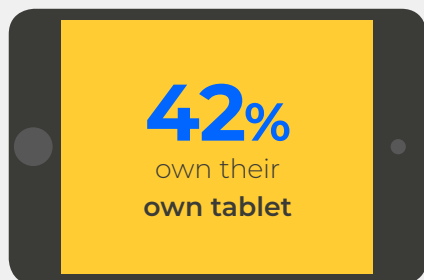
Top tips to support children 5-7 (Key stage 1)

As screens become a bigger part of young children's lives at home and at school, it's important to put balance and purpose behind screen time to help them develop key skills and benefit from their screen use. Find tips and advice to help them do just that.

How are children using screens?

42% own their **own tablet**

82% are online almost **9 hours a week**

63% play games online for nearly **7.5 hours a week**

Nearly **7 out of 10** of 5 - 7s who use YouTube watch cartoons and funny videos or pranks

Source: Ofcom Children and Parents Media use and attitudes report 2018

What do parents say about screen time?

Screens are good for creativity

Nearly 7 out of 10 parents believe that using devices gives children another way of being creative for example a child who enjoys dancing, sharing a new routine online with family and friends.

Screens can displace family and homework time

Even at this relatively young age, **almost 3 out of every 10 parents** say screen time means they have to fight for their child's attention and over a quarter (26%) say it has an impact on completing homework.

Source: *Internet Matters Look both ways report*

# What are the benefits and challenges of screen use?

Screen time benefits

- Screen use provides a range of opportunities for creativity and learning – **70% of parents strongly agree that using devices is essential** for their child's development
Source: Internet Matters Look both ways report.

- Screens can be a great tool to allow children to **maintain relationships** with family and friends.

- **Screens can help ease the financial burden** when looking to entertain children.

Screen time challenges

- Young children might stumble **across inappropriate content** that may have a negative impact on their digital wellbeing.

- Passive screen time **could have a physical effect on their development** (i.e. eyes, brain), sleep cycle and behaviour.

- Younger children **may not understand the concept of what the internet is** and how it works so could find it hard to differentiate between what it real and what is fake.
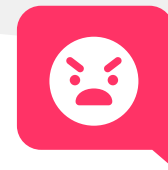
5 top tips to balance screen time

1 Set digital rules together

Agree digital boundaries together with your child to get them involved in the process and build up their understanding of why it's beneficial for them to stick to them.

Choosing device free zones in the home, keeping phones out of the bedroom at night and using free tools to turn devices on and off at different times of the day are just some ways to help children strike a healthy balance between activities on and offline.

Also, it's a good idea to encourage them to take a break every 30 minutes and use screens in short bursts. Experts recommend turning screens off an hour before bedtime to give children time to wind down.

2 Stay engaged in their screen use

Get engaged and stay engaged in their digital life as they grow. The more you get involved and understand the things your children do online, the easier it is to gain their respect and influence what they do in their digital world.

Ensure they have a healthy mix of screen activities that encourage creativity, learning & education, connecting with family & friends, as well as using devices for downtime.

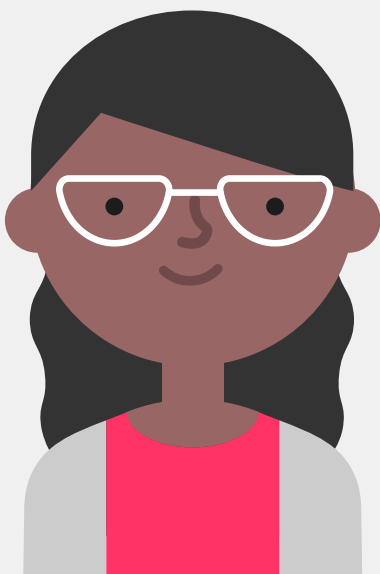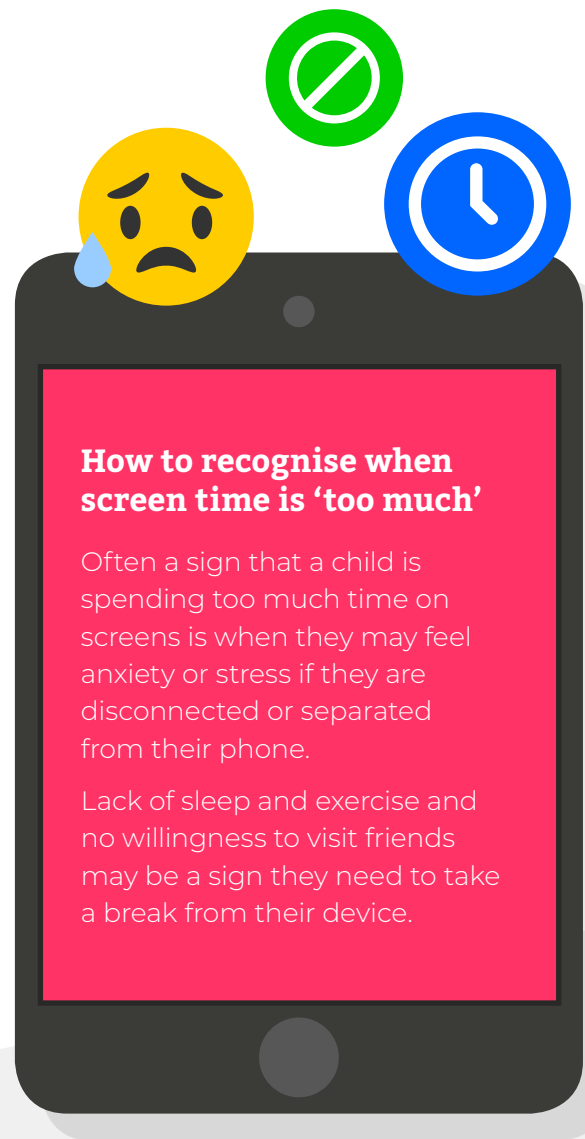### 3 Discuss online risks and strategies to tackle them

Take time to **help them understand the risks and benefits of using the internet,** whether it be discussing what steps to take if they see something that upsets them or guiding them towards apps and platforms that will help them explore their passions and enhance their skills.

4 Set a good example with your own screen use

Children will tend to model their behaviour on you, so if you encourage them to take breaks when on screens or leave phones out of the bedroom at night, they will follow your lead.

5 Use tech tools to manage their time & access to media

Whatever device your child uses, **be sure to make use of free and premium tools available** to manage their access to age-appropriate content and review the time they spend on specific online activities.

How to recognise when screen time is 'too much'

Often a sign that a child is spending too much time on screens is when they may feel anxiety or stress if they are disconnected or separated from their phone.

Lack of sleep and exercise and no willingness to visit friends may be a sign they need to take a break from their device.

The truth about screen time

Not all screen time is created equal so it's important to encourage children to have a healthy balance between passive screen time (i.e watching YouTube) and interactive screen time (i.e. creating content or playing games online).

There is no safe level of screen time but it doesn't mean that all screen time is harmful. Lack of evidence has meant that experts have found it hard to recommend a cut-off for children screen time overall.

One size does not fit all when it comes to screen time – it's more about getting it right for your families needs.