

SCREEN TIME



CONTEXT

Screen time is a phrase that is often broadly used to refer to any time spent on a device such as a computer, smartphone, tablet, or television. Guidelines and research about the impact of screen time, particularly for youth, is ever-changing and evolving. Time spent on a device is time not spent sleeping or engaging in in-person interactions or, in many cases, physical activity.

There are myriad issues related to screen time. This subject is receiving increased attention in Arlington as a result of Arlington Public Schools' (APS) one-to-one initiative, which gives all students in 3rd-12th grade their own personal device for school-related tasks. APS has online resources for parents and others available on their website. In addition, the Arlington Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families (APCYF) continues to research how best to engage the community in monitoring the impact of screens on the lives of Arlington children and families.

FINDINGS

As youth get older, they are spending more time in front of screens. In a recent survey, APS students were asked to self-report the amount of time they spend on a device for learning and entertainment and on social media. On average, youth spend about 3-4 hours online for entertainment, with the total time increasing as they age.¹

The survey also showed that high school students who spend 6 or more hours on a device per day were more likely to also say that they frequently feel sad (25%), compared to students who are on a screen fewer than 6 hours per day (16%).¹

This relationship is likely due to an interplay of factors. Youth who are depressed or frequently sad may spend more time online. Conversely, youth who spend more time online may engage in fewer activities such as exercising, clubs, sports, or spending time outside.

This same survey showed that 67% of elementary and middle school students report spending time outside on most days or almost every day when they spend fewer than 6 hours per day on a screen.¹

On the flipside, only 58% of elementary and middle school students who spend 6 or more hours per day online report being outside with the same frequency.¹

As youth get older, they spend more time viewing screens; as much as 10 hours per day on average for high school students.

