

Screen Time and Mental Health



Session Plan

Session	Screen Time and Mental Health
Background Information	Research from Ofcom shows that children and young people are spending an increasing amount of time on screens. Being online brings many benefits. It is a powerful vehicle through which children and young people can develop, form connections, overcome forms of discrimination or exclusion, participate and be heard in meaningful decision-making processes, and exercise their rights. At the same time, there is evidence of the potential harms that screens can have on physical and mental health. It is therefore important that children and young people are supported to develop positive digital habits and have a good balance between online and offline activities.
Aim	To raise awareness of screen time and its impact on mental health and wellbeing, particularly among children and young people.
Learning Outcomes	Participants will be able to 1. Dispel some of the misconceptions about screens 2. Provide a definition of screen time 3. Describe types of screen use 4. Discuss the impact of screen time on mental health 5. Discuss the different ways to support the mental health of those who have experienced the negative effects of screens
Duration	• 1.5 hours
Resources	• IT • Quiz • Presentation • Flipchart/pens • Session handout • Evaluation

Learning outcomes	Participant Activity	Resources	Time
1. Dispel some of the misconceptions about screens	Quiz	Quiz	10 min
2. Describe what screen time is	Screen time definition	Flipchart Pens Slide	10 min
3. Describe types of screen use	Types of screen use	Flipchart Pens Slide	10 min
4. Discuss the impact of screens on mental health	Impact of screens	Flipchart Pens Slide	20 min
5. Discuss the different ways to support those who have experienced the negative effects of screens	Self-help and Services	Slide Handout	20 min
6. Looking after our own mental health	Self-care	Slide	5 min
7. Reflection and session close	Reflection	Evaluation	5 min

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Facilitator notes

Slide	Notes	Time	Resources
1	Welcome participants and introduce yourself before offering an overview of the session. Have the title slide up and be visible whilst doing this. Emphasise that the session today is merely an introduction to screen use and mental health. The session will have a particular focus on the way in which screen use relates to children and young people's mental health. This session is not intended to make people experts but to offer a basic awareness and understanding of screen use, the impact it can have on children and young people's mental health, and what support can look like.	5 min	Slides

	Keeping safe Reinforce this is a basic awareness session and does not allow for detailed discussion. If you are concerned about a participant's mental health and wellbeing and feel they may be in distress, their Doctor should be their first point of contact. If you feel the person's life is in immediate danger please call 999 for assistance. Online delivery Please refer to the Healthy Minds Online Guidance if you are facilitating a session online.		
2	Put up the session overview slide and read out what will be covered today.		
Activity	Screens Quiz Group or Individual Activity Let's start with exploring some of the knowledge and attitudes that surround screens. Distribute the quiz to participants. This can be done on an individual basis or as a group. Ask participants to complete the quiz by deciding whether the statements are true or false. This is a good starting point and gives an insight into the participants' knowledge and attitudes on the subject matter. Once completed, go through each of the questions of the quiz to generate discussion. Use the supporting statements to provide the correct answers and information. Discussion point: What did participants think? Were there any surprises? Inform participants the quiz is a useful activity to start exploring how screens can impact people.	10 min (5 min activity, 5 min feedback)	Quiz
3	What is screen time? Now we are going to explore our thoughts and feelings about screen time. What do we understand "screen time" to mean? This can be done as a whole group discussion or you can divide participants into groups. Whole Group: Ask participants to share their understanding of what screen time is. Take feedback.	10 min (5 min activity, 5 min feedback)	Flipchart Pens

	Group activity: Divide the participants into groups or breakout rooms and invite the groups to discuss the question. Each group should nominate a person to feedback on their discussion. Invite the groups to feedback on their discussions. Share the “What is screen time?” slide – the definition is from the Oxford English Dictionary. Acknowledge any similarities that groups may have discussed and shared that resonate with the definition shown. Let participants know that definitions of screen time vary. For example, in their most recent guidelines, the World Health Organisation focuses only on sedentary screen time, defining it as “time spent passively watching screen-based entertainment (TV, computers, mobile devices)”. This, however, doesn’t include using screens for exercise, for example, and doesn’t capture the variety of ways people are using screens in everyday life. Let participants know that at the moment, experts have not agreed on a unified definition of screen time, which is why the Oxford Definition has been shown.		
4	Types of screen time We have covered what we mean by screen time, and we are now going to explore how people are spending their time online. This can be done as a whole group discussion or you can divide participants into groups. Whole Group: Ask participants to think of all the various ways that people can spend their time online. Take feedback. Group activity: Divide the participants into groups and invite the groups to discuss the question. Each group should nominate a person to feedback on their discussion. Invite the groups to feedback on their discussions. Share the “Types of screen time” slide. Acknowledge any similarities that groups may have discussed and shared that resonate with the slides shown. Let participants know that this list isn’t exhaustive, but that it highlights the range of ways that people are spending their time online. Note that children and young people often engage in what is known as “multi-screening”, where they use	10 min (5 min activity, 5 min feedback)	Flipchart Pens

	multiple devices at the same time. This means that they might be doing several of these activities at once. Let participants know that what people are doing online and their motivations for going online are also important to consider alongside how much time they are spending. This is because no two online experiences are the same – someone who spends 20 minutes connecting with a loved one will have a very different experience from someone who spends 20 minutes passively scrolling on social media or engaging in upward social comparisons. The impacts on our mental health will also therefore not be the same. Remind participants that time spent on screens can blend seamlessly with our ‘offline’ lives. For example, going online to access information about face-to-face support.		
5	Statistics The purpose of the statistics section is to give an overview of how much time people spend on screens and the impact that it has. This is to highlight why it is important to raise awareness and develop our understanding. Inform the participants we are going to look at some statistics to help give us a picture of the impact screen time can have. Read the information from the slides. Discussion point: Once you have read out the information, ask the participants what their thoughts and views are on the statistics. Are they surprised by them? Summarise: Statistics provide a snapshot of the impact screens can have on an individual. When it comes to the impact of screens on mental health and wellbeing, the picture isn’t clear-cut, and there currently is no evidence for the perfect cut-off point or ideal amount of time to be spending online. The clearest relationship that we can see from the literature is screen time’s impact on depression and quality of life. These negative mental health impacts might be through the content that is watched (e.g. exposure to bullying), the displacement of other activities (e.g. online interactions replacing face-to-face socialisation, leading to social isolation), or through direct cognitive effects (e.g. the impact of blue light on sleep). It highlights the importance of talking	5 min	Slides

	about it and understanding how people are spending their time online, so we know how we can best support them with any issues that may arise.		
Activity 6 & 7	What are the impacts of screen time? Group Activity We are moving on to explore the impacts of screens on mental health. Either as a whole group, or in breakout rooms if delivering online, invite participants to think about, discuss, and write down how screen use can impact a person – the benefits it can have, and the potential harms. When answering this question, invite participants to think about the various ways in which people might be spending their time online and the impact that this could have. Once completed, take feedback from each group, asking for one/two examples from each. Bring up the slides to highlight the benefits of screen time. Then show the slide that gives some examples of the potential harms, highlighting that this is not an exhaustive list. Conclude that this exercise demonstrates the breadth of the impact that screen time can have across the life course and in a variety of settings/situations. Often it can be a combination of impacts, some of which might be positive, and some might be negative. Remind participants that everyone's experience is also individual to them.	20 min (10 min activity, 10 min feedback)	Flipchart Pens
Activity & 8	Supports Group Activity This section of the session will explore what supports could be considered for those struggling with their mental health as a result of screen-related impacts. For the purpose of this activity, we have themed these into: • Individual: What we can do as individuals to support those struggling with their mental health as a result of screen-related impacts. • Society: What society as a whole can be doing to raise awareness of the impact screen time can have, and what support can look like.	20 min (10 min activity, 5 min feedback)	Slide Flipchart Pens Online harm resources handout

	Either as a whole group or in breakout rooms, invite participants to discuss the above. Once completed, take feedback, asking for one/two examples from each group. Once all groups have fed back, bring the slide up. Acknowledge any similarities the groups have come up with that resonate with the examples on the slide. Briefly go through each bullet point. Individual • Talking: Create safe and supportive environments where people can discuss screen-related challenges, without stigma. • Signposting to appropriate support: Provide information on accessible mental health services, counselling, and resources to help the individual cope with issues related to screen addiction, cyberbullying, or social media pressure. • Peer support and role modelling: Sharing your own experiences of being online and any times you've struggled to manage the time you're spending on screens can be a powerful intervention and source of support. Parents, carers, and adults can be great role models for children and young people around their screen use, so where possible, it's important that adults, parents/carers try to lead by example. • Providing self-help resources: There is a range of self-help resources listed in the supporting resources document that can help people have a positive online experience. • Promote digital literacy: Support an individual to reflect on their screen use – what's working for them and what isn't. This could include integrating digital literacy into school curriculums, teaching children how to navigate the internet responsibly, identify misinformation, and engage safely online so they have a positive experience. Society • Education & awareness: Increase awareness about the potential dangers that can be associated with problematic screen use through educational campaigns. • Provide digital wellbeing guidance: Provide resources and workshops on how to encourage positive digital wellbeing and habits among young people. These could be targeted at professionals or parents/carers, for example. • Support Services: Provide accessible mental health services, counselling, and resources to help young individuals cope with		
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	issues related to screen addiction, cyberbullying, or social media pressure. • Regulation & Policy: Advocate for and enforce regulations such as the Online Safety Act that look to limit the exposure of children to harmful content or behaviour, including content promoting self-harm, hate speech, or online predators. • Awareness Raising Days: Take part in awareness days to promote the safe and positive use of digital technology, including Safer Internet Day (February) and CyberScotland Week (February). Remind participants that they don't need to know a lot about the internet or particular social media platforms, they just need to have open and supportive conversations with people about how being online makes them feel.		
9	Remind the participants of the importance of looking after their own mental health and provide a self-care activity.	5 min	Slide
Session Close	Thank the participants for their time and ask them to complete an evaluation.	5 min	Evaluation