

## Abstract

**Objective:** Extensive screentime is associated with poor cognitive, education, and health outcomes, but parent screentime cognitions remain understudied. Thus, this study assessed cognitions of parents of 6-to-11 year-olds' related to screentime (i.e., time spent with television, computers, tablet, phones), including perceived importance, barriers to, and facilitators of screentime.

**Methods:** English- and Spanish-speaking parents in 3 states (FL, NJ, WV) completed a brief survey (n=185) and 37 participated in focus group discussions moderated by trained researchers.

**Results:** Parents completing the survey reported their children had 2.38±1.77SD hours of screentime daily. Parents did not feel that screentime influenced their children's desire for food or beverages advertised on TV, with more than three-quarters stating their children had not asked for foods advertised on TV in the past week. Focus group discussions revealed that limiting children's screentime was a priority of parents. Parents stressed the importance of limiting screentime to promote verbal communication in the family and prevent kids from being "lazy" or inactive. However, parents commonly identified busy work schedules and stress as key barriers to limiting screentime because having children play on their tablets or watch TV or movies made it convenient for parents to complete other household tasks. Parents also felt kids got restless and bored easily and that they could avoid arguments by allowing children to have screentime. Strategies to facilitate limiting children's screentime were setting time limits, being consistent with these rules, and providing other activities, such as helping with meal preparation or participation in organized activities. Additionally, parents also reported it was important for them to set an example for children by controlling their own screentime, particularly time spent on smart phones. Parents urged talking to kids about the healthfulness of the foods or beverages advertised on TV, recognizing this as an opportunity to teach children the "selling" purpose of advertisements.

**Conclusions:** Children's screentime exceeds recommendations, despite parents' attempts to control their screentime. Obesity prevention programs could help parents learn effective strategies for controlling screentime.

## Methods

### Sample

- Parents of 6-11 year olds
- English and Spanish speaking
- In WV, NJ, and FL

### Data Collection

- Survey (n=185)
- Focus groups (n=37)
  - Conducted by trained researchers
  - Constant comparison to identify point of data saturation
  - Content analysis for themes and trends



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## What Parents Had to Say

• "You have to limit their [screen] time, create a schedule of things for them to do, and occupy their time with other things."

• "Kids learn by example. If you are not glued to the television as a parent and instead engage your kids in other activities, they will follow what you do."

• "Keeping her entertained by watching TV is so convenient for me while I do other stuff"

• "We set an actual timer. When the time goes off, they know [screen] time is up."

• "When we watch sports and they see commercials—it's amazing how they see these things and instantly want them."

• "Before they grab their tablet or TV they are warned how much time they will have [to use it]."

• "Create a schedule of things for them to do and occupy their time with other things."

## Results

### Children's Screentime Behaviors

- Children viewed 2.51±2.60 hours of screen time/day

### Parents' Screentime Cognitions

- Most parents (78%) did not feel TV advertisements for food/beverages influenced children
- Talking to kids about advertisements provided an opportunity to teach about
  - Goal of advertisements
  - Healthfulness of advertised foods/beverages
- Limiting screen time was important to parents
  - To promote verbal communication
  - To minimize "laziness"/ inactivity

### Barriers to Limiting Children's Screentime

- Busy schedules
- Convenience of TV
- Avoid conflicts with children

### Strategies for Overcoming Screentime Barriers

- Setting time limit
- Enforcing screentime rules
- Providing other activities for kids
- Setting positive examples by parents



## Strengths and Limitations

### Strengths

- Overcame language barrier by offering focus groups in both English and Spanish
- Focus Groups were led by trained moderators using scripted a moderator's guide to ensure uniformity and completeness
- Geographic diversity (NJ, FL, WV)

### Limitations

- Low representation of fathers
- Data were self-report

## Conclusions

- Parents believe that limiting screentime is important
- Busy schedules and the convenience of TV are barriers to limiting children's screentime
- Setting guidelines, providing other activities, and role modeling are methods parents use to limit screentime
- Kids are getting more than the recommended screentime/day
- Future obesity prevention programs should help parents increase their repertoire of effective strategies for controlling children's screentime