It can be challenging for parents and carers to know whether children are spending too much time on their devices. Furthermore, it’s even more of a challenge to know whether a child is addicted to the Internet and social media. As technology is becoming more pervasive, children and young people are experiencing tech-related dependencies. Do we as parents and carers have the knowledge to identify and support children and young people who may be developing an addiction to their devices?

47% of parents said they thought their children spent too much time in front of screens.

What parents need to know about
SCREEN ADDICTION

SMARTPHONE ADDICTION IS A RECOGNISED HEALTH CONDITION
Children as young as 13 are attending ‘smartphone rehab’ following growing concerns over screen time. There are now help centers in the UK which deal with screen addiction for children and adults showing the seriousness of device addiction.

IT CAN CAUSE SLEEP DEPRIVATION
7 out of 10 children said they had missed school as a result of not getting enough sleep. Parents have established this, have the conversation with them to discuss why you are implementing a screen limit.

CONFIDENCE, SUPPORT & ACCEPTANCE
The Children’s Commissioner report ‘Life in Likes’, explored how children aged 8 - 11 are using social media today. It showed that children are using their devices to speak to their online friends about their problems and seek acceptance and support, removing face to face interactions.

APPS CAN BE ADDICTIVE
Apps have been designed with ‘psychological tricks’ to constantly keep grabbing your attention. One example of this is on the app Snapchat, where you can gain ‘streaks’ when interacting with your friends. If you don’t respond, you lose the streak. This addictive nature of apps aims to engage children and keep them coming back for more.

LIMIT SCREEN TIME
In today’s digital age, technology is an important part of a child’s development. Ensuring that your child has a healthy interaction with their device means they are missing out on a lot. Rather than banning them from using their devices, why not set a screen time limit. Work out what you think is a suitable and healthy amount of time for your child to be on their device per week.

LESS TIME MEANS LESS EXPOSURE
There are many risks associated with devices, such as cyberbullying, grooming, inappropriate content etc. Less time spent on a screen means that a child will be less exposed to these risks.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE
It may seem like an obvious solution, but encouraging children to play with their friends, read a book, or playing outdoors will help them realise they can have fun without their devices. Playing football, trampolining, camping, going for a walk or playing with other children will help them understand they don’t need their device.

MOBILE-FREE MEAL TIMES
Have you tried to settle your child by giving them a tablet at the dinner table or restaurant? This may seem like a quick fix to calm them down but in reality, it is encouraging them to use their device as a distraction from conversation and dealing with their emotions. We suggest removing all technology from the dinner table and having conversations with your family about how their day has been.

REMOVE DEVICES FROM THEIR BEDROOM
Setting a rule about removing devices from bedrooms will help your child to get the sleep they need and be more focussed the next day. 20% of teenagers said that they wake up to check their social network accounts on their devices. Even if having a device switched off in their bedroom, they may be tempted to check for notifications.

ENCOURAGE ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES
It may seem like an obvious solution, but encouraging children to play with their friends, read a book, or playing outdoors will help them realise they can have fun without their devices. Playing football, trampolining, camping, going for a walk or playing with other children will help them understand they don’t need their device.

Source: [National Online Safety](https://www.nationalonlinesafety.com)