



# The National Healthy Childhood Programme



## Newsletter 3: Winter 2017

Welcome to the third newsletter of the National Healthy Childhood Programme.

As Christmas approaches this issue contains timely advice in relation to screen time and toys for children. A summary of some of the work being progressed is also outlined.

I would like to acknowledge all of the input provided by so many people during 2017 which has helped to progress the child health work.

Wishing you and your families a very happy Christmas and all the best for 2018.

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### How to manage children's screen time

From iPads to 'skip ad' and HD to RTÉ Player, one of the major changes in Irish homes over recent years has been the increased use of screens and devices both big and small.

As Christmas approaches and Santa delivers his presents, the amount of time children spend in front of screens (including watching programmes and videos and interacting with apps on TVs, tablets or phones) is likely to be a topic of discussion among parents and carers.



#### Problems associated with screen time:

There is evidence to suggest that if a child spends a lot of time in front of a screen in early childhood, they could be more likely to:

- Sleep less and have sleep issues
- Have poorer language skills
- Be overweight or obese
- Have poorer cognitive skills, e.g. issues with their attention

A child might experience these issues because the more time they are spending in front of a screen, the less time they are spending in activities which are key to their development, such as playing, moving, sleeping and watching and interacting with those around them. Evidence also suggests that having a TV on in the background can have negative impacts on a child's development.

#### How much screen time is okay for young children?

Be mindful of your child's exposure to screen time. Parents of children under 18 months should avoid allowing their child to spend time in front of a screen other than for video calls like Skype and FaceTime. This is because there is not enough evidence to suggest that screen time can be good for their development.

Children aged 18 to 24 months should spend as little time as possible in front of a screen and those aged between two and five should spend no more than one hour a day. Parents of children aged six and older should place consistent limits on the time spent on screens and on these types of devices to ensure this time doesn't interfere with sleep and physical activities.

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