Putting tv and media on timeout

By Leilana McKindra

STILLWATER, Okla. – Parents should monitor children’s screen time year-round, not just during the school year, because too much time in front of televisions, computers and other screened devices can have a negative effect.

Greater screen time is associated with children’s academic, social, emotional and health problems, said Laura Hubbs Tait, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension parenting specialist.

“Watching television and using other technology can be educational, but long hours of screen time means children are not spending that time in physical activity, interacting positively with others, reading, doing homework or getting sufficient sleep,” Hubbs Tait said.

In fact, research indicates children who watch less television do better on standardized tests and other indicators of school success and are less aggressive with their peers. By contrast, children who watch more television not only have school and peer problems, but also engage in less physical activity, eat more candy and fast food, and are more likely to be obese or overweight.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting total screen entertainment time for children ages 2 and older to two hours or less daily. The guideline applies to all devices with screens such as laptops, tablets and cell phones.

Although about a third of programming is viewed on screened devices, television still rules the media roost when it comes to children’s media consumption habits, according to research cited by AAP.

“There is evidence documenting links between media and sexual activity, violent behavior, alcohol and substance abuse, obesity and other risky behaviors children may engage in, so it’s important for parents to set some ground rules and closely monitor their children’s screen time,” Hubbs Tait said.

One of the easiest ways to begin trimming screen time is to keep the television and Internet-connected devices out of the kids’ bedroom.
A May 2014 study in “Journal of the American Medical Association – Pediatrics” recommended parents monitor screen time in four ways to improve children’s emotional, social and academic behavior: watch programs with children, restrict viewing time, establish limits for acceptable content, and discuss implications of content with children.

Beyond that, families should convert meals into no-media times by turning off the television and setting aside cell phones and other devices.

“Mealtimes are good opportunities for family members to share with each other,” Hubbs Tait said. “As an added benefit, research indicates families who eat together tend to enjoy more nutritious meals compared to families that eat separately.”

The AAP also recommends establishing an evening curfew for all media devices, including cell phones, and enforcing reasonable guidelines for using cell phones, texting, the Internet and social media sites.

Limiting screen time should be a family project.

“Seeing adults modeling positive behavior increases the likelihood kids will follow suit, so encourage the whole family to cut down on the amount of time they spend in front of a screened device,” Hubbs Tait said.

For more information on limiting screen time for kids, visit your county Extension office and visit the AAP website at www.aap.org.