Healthy Practices for the Classroom in the Digital Age  
What Educators Need to Know  
High School

Children aged 14-18 have increasingly complex friendships, including interest in dating and sexual intimacy. Their peers are their primary reference group for information. They continue to develop their capacity for logical and abstract thinking. Although children in the high school years enjoy and benefit from frequent opportunities for freedom from adult supervision, they are limited in their ability to control impulses and make reasoned decisions. They also face health dangers from risk taking, poor impulse control, and the onset of mental health problems, particularly mood disorders.

Needs in School and Home for Healthy Development

- Ongoing adult monitoring of computer and media use.
- Daily opportunities for gross motor activity, such as daily physical education and regular extracurricular recreational activities.
- Frequent opportunities for verbal conversation with parents, teachers, and peers to develop and refine communication and relationship skills.
- Daily opportunities for structured and unstructured interaction with peers to learn and refine social/emotional skills.
- Practice and reinforcement of keyboarding and handwriting skills to promote fluency and healthy habits, thereby reducing the risk for overuse injuries like carpal tunnel syndrome.
- A balance of learning types (screen, paper, verbal, teacher-directed) offered throughout the day.
- Reminders to use good posture and natural body positioning and to frequently change position when using the computer. Avoid use of computer in lap.
- Homework assignments should support a healthy balance of daily activities, including daily child/adult interaction, daily peer interactions, physical activity, development of non-academic interests and sleep.
- Option of requesting paper/text versions of assignments.
- Structure and support for the development of time management skills and habits that reflect a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

Best Screen Use

- Time on computers and screens must be guided and limited by adults.
  - Incorporate breaks to allow for movement and changes in visual focus.
  - Device-free days should be provided for all students.
Use screens in conjunction with adult interaction and multiple other types of learning to support and enhance comprehension.

**Watch Out**
- The risk of nearsightedness (myopia) increases in children who have fewer opportunities for outdoor activities.
- The risk of obesity rises with increasing screen time.
- Device use in the hour prior to bedtime inhibits sleep and should be avoided.
- Homework assignments should include options for paper/text-based work.
- Avoid substitution of face-to-face peer interactions with virtual or digital interactions.
- Irreversible and permanent damage can occur when earbuds/headphones are too loud. Earphones should be kept at the lowest possible volume; if sounds can be heard by a person standing next to the student, the sound is too loud. Earphones/earbuds should not be used in environments with moderate or high levels of background noise.
- Throughout the high school years, brain development in areas related to controlling impulses and emotions is limited. Consequently, older teens remain limited in their ability to consistently make rational, appropriate decisions. Older teens remain at risk for making poor decisions in the digital world (i.e., sexually explicit photos, inappropriate texts) and require ongoing supervision and support.

**Parent and Guardian Tips**
- Limit screen use to family areas. Avoid keeping or storing them in bedrooms (including TVs).
- Teens require 8 hours of sleep but often have difficulty falling asleep before 11 pm due to delayed release of melatonin after puberty. Cell phones in bedrooms contribute to delayed and disordered sleep.
- Teach healthy habits and model desired behaviors by putting away devices to permit frequent personal interactions.
- Develop a family media plan that outlines family rules about media use. See this [Family Media Use Plan](#) and [family contract](#).
- Additional resources for parents are available at the HealthyChildren.org website with [Tips for a Digital Age](#) and [Growing Up Digital](#) on the BCPS website.

Find the full reports from the Digital Health Workgroup at the [World Wide Web Baltimore County Public Schools Website](#).

For more information, contact the Baltimore County Public Schools Office of Health Services at 443-809-6368.