

# SCREEN TIME & GREEN TIME

“Brush your teeth, eat your veggies and get plenty of green time!”

Carley McGauran  
Psychologist & Mum



In this time of parenting in a digital world parents want to ensure their children are healthy. I know many of us feel overwhelmed about exactly what this means! With regard to how much screen time children should have, I explain to parents that there is no magical number of hours deemed “healthy”. BUT I do encourage parents to introduce a concept of ‘green time’ alongside screen time.

Our job as parents is to mentor and prepare our children to thrive in a digital world. Aside from keeping them safe online and ensuring they are accessing quality, age appropriate content, we need to support them in developing healthy habits - balancing screen time with ‘green time’. It is ideal for all children to understand the importance of ‘green time’ just as they grow to understand why brushing their teeth and eating vegetables needs to be a part of daily life!

All elements of ‘green time’ have a mountain of evidence supporting their critical role in the healthy growth and development of our children and young people. So what do I mean when I say ‘green time’?

**Outside time** - refers to traditional green time engaging in any activity outside in the natural world, this has such a remarkable restorative effect for our brains.

**Moving time** - any activity where our children are moving their bodies (sport, dance, bush walk, bike ride, trampoline, hopscotch...)

**Mindful time** - if you are not already in a habit as a family of some sort of mindfulness practice (placing your attention in the present moment), just start experimenting- it supports all human beings to build mental fitness. There are many options, it may mean listening to a meditation story at bedtime or simply google “mindful activities for children” and you will find a plethora of simple ideas depending on the age of your children.

**Social time** - ensuring our children have ample opportunities to engage with friends and family face to face. Even just being out and about, interacting with fellow customers and shop keepers builds critical social skills.

**Unstructured time** - (children may call this ‘boring time!’) refers to when you say “off you go and find something to do, no screens!”. Children typically complain (you know what I mean) and then after that their brain’s natural capacity to be creative and explore is activated and yes they find something to do!! Children experiencing boredom is actually very important for their development.

**Reading time** - this isn’t limited to just encouraging your child to read a book or you reading to them, it may mean reading a recipe while cooking or reading signs when you are out walking.

**‘Green time’** in my household , with three children, is a well known concept. When I asked one of my children to come inside to set the table for dinner recently, he answered with “I can’t, I’m getting my green time” (aka shooting basketball hoops with his brother!)... hard to be too cranky about that response!!