



PARENT EDUCATION

Screen time, Childhood and Development - A Community Conversation
February 10, 2026 hosted by GPA

Key Themes & Takeaways

1. Screens Are Not “Good” or “Bad” — Context Matters

The discussion highlighted the complex impact of technology on early childhood. The panel emphasized moving beyond doomsday scenarios towards a more realistic awareness of the ubiquitous use of technology. What matters most is how much, when and where screens are being used, and what they are potentially replacing. Dosing matters, as does awareness of how kids are responding. Timing (especially near bedtime), pacing, and supervision all influence outcomes.

2. Early Childhood Is a Sensitive Window

From both clinical and Montessori perspectives, the **0–6 age range** is uniquely important, as children in this period are building sleep patterns and self-regulation, developing attention and concentration, absorbing language and social cues, learning through movement and real-world interactions. Screens can displace experiences that are foundational during this stage—especially face-to-face interaction, imaginative play, and boredom (which fuels creativity). It was generally understood that screen use at 3 and below can be particularly harmful, and increased awareness of screen use is important as kids grow.

3. Sleep and Regulation Are Central

The clinical evidence shared by Dr. Sammy Dhaliwal highlighted the link between blue light exposure and stimulating content to delayed sleep onset, reduced sleep quality and increased impulsivity and emotional dysregulation. Healthy screen boundaries—particularly in the evening—support better rest and better daytime functioning. She also emphasized that screens are not destiny. Patterns can shift, and behavior often improves within weeks when sleep and screen habits improve.

4. Developmental Needs Change, But Relationships Remain Key

As kids get older and start elementary school in the **6–12 age range**, children shift toward reasoning, belonging, and peer relationships. Emily Bittner suggested that the conversation around screen-use evolves—but the core need for real-world interaction and responsibility remains. Across ages, relationship-building is essential. Co-viewing, discussing content, and modeling thoughtful device use can transform passive consumption into connection.

5. Modeling Matters

Parental awareness of screen use and good modeling is key to improving our kids' relationships with screens and technology. Children absorb not only what we allow or disallow — but also how we behave ourselves! The conversation included simple practices such as device-free meals, naming our own screen use (“I need to send this email, then I’ll put my phone away”), and creating predictable routines (family movie nights or screen-free days) to help shape children’s understanding of moderation and balance.

6. Empowerment Over Shame

A recurring message throughout the evening was this: No family is perfect. No single rule fits all. Screens are part of modern life. The goal is not perfection, but **awareness, flexibility, and thoughtful adjustment**, particularly when sleep, behavior or family functioning suffers. Then it’s time to adjust, and change is possible.

An Ongoing Conversation

The most important takeaway was the spirit of the evening itself. Families shared openly, asked honest questions, and reflected on their own values and challenges. This is the beginning, not the end of an important ongoing conversation that will continue throughout early and later education. The goal isn’t to eliminate screens. It’s to ensure that technology supports childhood development, while also respecting that screen-time is sometimes unavoidable and can be an important source of entertainment and learning.

Navigating screen-time is an ongoing and evolving commitment—shaped by research, informed by education, and strengthened by community conversation. We’ve learned a lot about thoughtful / purposeful use, and the importance of being aware of our own behaviors as parents. The evening ended with an invitation by the parent ed committee to keep the conversation going. If you have a book or resource on the topic worth sharing or want to dive deeper into a particular aspect of the conversation, reach out to any of the panelists through the GTMS directory.