Gooseberry Alert No 50
Screen Time

What do you know about your students' screen time? Ofcom's report on children's media use published in 2019 https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/134907/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-2018.pdf suggests that 97% of **5-7 year olds** spend 13 ¼ hours watching TV each week, 63% play games for 7 ½ hours per week and 82% go online for around 9 ½ hours per week. For **8-11 year olds**, most spend 13 hours on TV, 10 hours gaming and 13 ½ hours on the internet. 35% of this age group have their own smartphone and 47% have their own tablet and many are allowed to take their devices to bed with them.

The time children spend online has almost doubled since 2009 whereas time spent watching TV has decreased. The use of mobile technology such as tablets, laptops and phones to watch programmes means that more children are watching alone. The availability of films, tv and videos on demand means that children are able to access the types of content they like (or sometimes unsuitable content) at any time, often unsupervised by adults.

What are the risks? Excessive screen time means less time for physical exercise with consequent risks of obesity, short sightedness, heart and mental health issues. Taking phones to bed means children may be tempted to use them after bedtime or that they are disturbed by late night messaging, which can disrupt sleep, concentration, and affect their ability to learn. Solitary viewing or using devices during meal times means children miss out on bonding with their families.

In your school:

See if your students are aware of recommended hours of sleep and exercise. NHS advice for sleep ranges from 11 hours for 5 year olds, 10 ¾ for 6 year olds, 10 ½ hours for 7-year olds to 9 ¼ hours for 12-13 year olds. To stay healthy, it is also recommended to aim for an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per day across the week. Getting the right amount of sleep and exercise benefits our mental wellbeing. It can help us reduce stress and anxiety, help us concentrate and generally make us feel better and happier.

Explore how much screen time your students have on average each weekday and weekend and whether that time is spent alone or with others.

Encourage your class to think about how much waking time there is in each day. Discuss what time children get up in the morning and what time they go to bed. How much of that time is spent at school? How much on travel, homework, chores, clubs or other activities. Having thought about that, assist the class to do a rough calculation of how much time might be free to spend on screens. Then ask:

- What do you think is a sensible amount of time for children to spend on screens each day?
- How could you help to regulate the time you spend?
- What could families do to help children manage their screen time?

You are welcome to share this with your school community so long as you reference Gooseberry Planet Ltd as your source.