



## SRI KUALA LUMPUR

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Circular No. OMEDB/SKL/19/02

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

### VIDEO SCREEN ADDICTION AT SRI KL

#### **Getting the Facts First**

Parents, before you read this message concerning your children at Sri KL, please take a little time to do this self-evaluation test.

*Question 1 : How much time do you think you spend looking at content on your phone (excluding any gaming apps) each day? Please take a little time to think about this before you answer.*

Now, go to the “screen time” function on your smart phone and check what is the actual length of time you spend on your phone.

If you are anything like the average Malaysian smart phone user, you spend 2 to 3 hours (or more!) a day just looking at your phone screen.

*Question 2 : How much time each day do you spend watching TV?*

Most people watch some TV each day. The content may come from a variety of sources such as Astro, Netflix, YouTube and traditional TV channels.

It may be a Premier League game or the latest installment of Game of Thrones, a constant drip feed of gardening/cooking shows on YouTube or a serious bingeing of your favorite Korean drama. Whatever it may be, you now need to add this to the total amount of screen time you experience each day. Conservatively, you can probably add another hour or two.

*Question 3 : Do you play video games on your phone or on a computer?*

If you do, then for most of you who play, you already know that you spend more time on this activity than you do looking at your phone or the TV or possibly both combined. Let’s add another 2 hours (but we know that’s actually too little).

**TOTAL AVERAGE DAILY SCREEN TIME = 5 HOURS (conservative estimate)**

*Last question : Given that there are 24 hours in a day and you probably need to spend 8 of those hours asleep, do you think this is a healthy amount of time to spend in front of a video screen every day on non-work related activities?*

If you think this is ok for any reason, then please stop reading this message because your screen addiction is now so strong that you are no longer receptive to plain and simple reasoning. We wish you all the best.

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If, like us on the other hand, you were surprised and concerned when you discovered the actual amount of time you spend in front of a screen each day on non-work related activities, then please read on.

As a society, we are facing an addiction epidemic that dwarfs the past 50 years of cigarette addiction in its scale. However, the actors in this drama are essentially the same as before. It used to be big tobacco companies lobbying government to stay in business. Now it's big video game developers, social media platform providers and on-line gambling operators doing the same thing. Whoever it is, it is still big business pushing a product, the general public is still the target market and big money continues to be made on the basic premise that human beings are predisposed to addictive behaviour.

*So what? Video games and social media won't kill the vast majority of users like smoking has. It's actually quite harmless, so what's the big deal?*

The truth is, we don't really fully understand yet just how much long-term psychological or physiological harm excessive screen time will do to our brains and our bodies because this phenomenon is really only a couple of decades old.

But, in the mean time, we can and should refer to the short-term studies done by researchers on the phenomenon of prolonged screen time exposure, gaming addiction and social media exposure amongst children and adults alike:

- **The American Academy of Pediatrics**, a respected and credible association of medical practitioners, recommends NO SCREEN TIME for children under the age of 2 and is critical of the effects of screen time for children under the age of five. This is because research shows video screen activity has health consequences and acts against language learning and socialization in small children.

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/128/5/1040>

- **The National Health Service of the United Kingdom** acknowledges the link between health issues and learning impairment associated with disrupted sleep caused by excessive screen time (more than 2 hours a day) in children aged 8 to 11. The NHS relied on a combined study by two respected Canadian universities and a children's hospital research unit published in the Lancet.

<https://www.nhs.uk/news/pregnancy-and-child/more-sleep-and-limiting-screen-time-may-improve-childrens-mental-abilities/>

- **The Department of Health, Australia**, recommends ZERO SCREEN TIME for children under 2 years old and 1 HOUR A DAY OR LESS for children aged 2 to 5 years old to avoid potential learning impairment and obesity.

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/gug-indig-hb~inactivitiy>

- **The UK Government** issued a public health warning on the dangers of social media and in particular FOMO (the Fear of Missing Out) and other mental health issues arising from social media participation.

<https://eandt.theiet.org/content/articles/2018/10/government-to-issue-social-media-safe-use-guidelines/>

- **US internet knowledge organization Wikipedia** presents a balanced overview of video game addiction based on available research but draws attention to its negative effects and subsequent action by various nations to limit these adverse effects.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Video\\_game\\_addiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Video_game_addiction)

- **An excellent guidance document by the Australian Government** to parents on the issue of online gaming activity highlights the threat of gaming addiction and what signs to look out for in yourself or members of your family.

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/parents/big-issues/gaming>

These references are just a small sample of the wealth of well-researched and respected literature available online about the effects of prolonged screen time exposure on children and adults and the adverse effects of social media, online gaming and gambling.

As such, we the management of Sri KL believe that some sobering conclusions can be made from the research and our own personal experiences, specifically:

- The weight of this evidence suggests that the overwhelming majority of smart phone users are “addicted” to their screens regardless of the content on those screens because of the overpowering visual stimulus screens give us. We simply like to stare at them!
- Those of us who play video games are further addicted to gaming due to the combination of “screen stimulus” and the addictive nature of the games themselves.
- The most toxic combination of “screen addiction” involves the use of screens and the internet for online gambling.
- The social and educational benefits of social media participation are in serious danger of being outweighed by the negative effects of screen addiction, peer shaming, self-harming and **the fear of missing out (FOMO)**.

We believe that these conclusions are a big deal.

The point is, as parents and educators, we have to be concerned with these findings and the potential or actual harm being done to our children through excessive screen exposure.

## **Proposed action for parents at Sri KL**

As such, we should like to propose to all parents of Sri KL that you sit down with your children and discuss the issues of screen addiction, excessive social media participation and gaming addiction in an open and frank manner that highlights the dangers they face. Please do so, sympathetically, and with the knowledge that we as parents are also screen addicts to a varying degree.

After this discussion, we then propose the following:

- You agree with your children that on school nights (SUNDAY to THURSDAY) screen time of any kind after school is limited to ONE HOUR. For children younger than 10 years old it should be less.
- You agree with your children that on school nights (SUNDAY to THURSDAY),
  - EITHER, the family modem and router will be turned off at 10.00PM to prevent internet access,
  - OR, all phones, laptops and screens will be handed in to mum or dad for safe-keeping until breakfast the next day.
  - OR, some other means is found to ensure your children get a good night's sleep before school the next day.
  - Time that would have been spent watching a screen, is now spent in some other activity such as reading a book, writing with a pen, playing games, listening to or playing music, walking, painting, drawing, conversation, sports and so on.

However, if you are unable to achieve this, we recommend that AT THE VERY LEAST, you impose these conditions on your children during EXAM TIME.

This means your children will have internet access and phone restrictions placed on them for the duration of their exam time table (approximately 1 to 2 weeks, twice a year). This is not much to ask, we feel.

## **In conclusion**

Doubtless there will be parents who disagree with our position on screen addiction and we respect your right to do what you feel is best for your children. However, to simply ignore the questions raised here would be to do them a great disservice and we hope you will at least consider and discuss the issues raised in this document when deciding whether to take any action to reduce your children's screen exposure.

Thank you.

THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT OF SRI KL