

Why regulating screen time in homes is a must

By Annabel Oyera

Mobile phones, tablets and televisions are increasingly shaping how children play, sleep, learn and interact, often at the expense of real-world connection. What began as technology meant to inform and entertain has now reshaped childhood itself, raising urgent questions about balance, wellbeing and family life.

Some parents believe children do not need personal smart-phones, until adulthood. Though controversial, this view is driven by concern over early exposure to online pressure, cyber crime and constant digital distraction. Parents who believe in delayed phone ownership say it makes children more present, emotionally settled and socially engaged.

DANGER BEYOND THE SCREEN

Hadijah Mwanje, the founder and executive director of High Sound for Children, an organisation that works to protect children from exposure to inappropriate content, says late night screen use has become common, with children sacrificing rest for



Children can develop anxiety, low self-esteem and emotional distress as they compare themselves to curated online lives

social media, videos and games. This disrupts natural sleep cycles, leaving children fatigued, irritable and unable to concentrate in class. Over time, poor sleep weakens the immunity, affects growth and undermines emotional stability, turning excessive screen use into a growing public health concern.

In many homes, screens have also replaced physical play; where children



Excessive digital exposure builds unrealistic expectations

who once ran, climbed trees and played outdoors, now spend long hours sitting indoors. She warns that excessive digital exposure creates unrealistic expectations, weakens creativity, shortens attention spans, disrupts sleep, and fuels depression among children as they seek online validation. Mwanje also notes that children are growing up in digital spaces that do

not reflect reality. She urges parents to set firm screen-time rules, monitor online activity and remain actively present in their children's lives.

THE DOPAMINE TRAP

Counselling psychologist Ali Male, from A-Z Professional Counselling and Support Centre, explains that social media, games and videos are designed

to trigger dopamine release through unpredictable rewards, such as likes, new content and level-ups.

"This overstimulates the brain, reducing patience for real-world learning, shortening attention spans and weakening empathy and social interaction," he says.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Alison Mugabe, a mother, encourages non-screen activities, such as outdoor play, board games, cooking, and baking, alongside clear and consistent house rules. She also urges parents to lead by example, communicate openly, and explain the limits without judgement.

Simple practices, such as no phones at the dinner table, screen-free weekends, and occasional digital detoxes are helping families reconnect. Though initially uncomfortable, many parents report calmer homes, better sleep and stronger bonds.

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