

Pandemic

Combatting serious effects of digital devices during COVID-19

Screen time among children and teens has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the cold-weather months, when families are more likely to be spending free time indoors, it's especially important that parents and caregivers set schedules to help ensure safe, healthy and balanced use of digital devices, according to experts.

"Digital devices and the internet have become absolutely necessary tools for kids, not only for school, but for connecting and socializing with friends. Unfortunately, these tools can often be used in unhealthy ways to fill a void left by the loss of many typical school-year routines," says Michele Havner, director of marketing, OurPact, a screen time monitoring app for parents.

Research has consistently shown that more screen time is often accompanied by health and wellness challenges like anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poor sleep and reduced physical activity. Havner says that parents can help kids build healthier relationships with digital devices in the following ways:

- Being good role models: Parents are in many



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cases relying on digital devices to work from home and may also be facing some of the same issues as their children, including boredom and isolation. However, they can serve as good digital role models by setting aside screen-free time for other activities, like art, cooking, music, exercise, crossword

puzzles, reading and more.

- Avoiding being punitive: This extended situation has been stressful for parents and kids alike, so parents should try to take a compassionate approach to the situation. When engaging children on screen use, they can start the conversation on the

right foot by acknowledging the many challenges and stressors that the "new normal" has created for young people. This is also a good time to check in about what exactly kids are doing online and whether the uptick in social media use has exposed them to negative content or cyberbullying.

- Setting schedules: Screen use before bed is associated with poor sleep due to the blue light emitted by digital devices, which can delay the release of sleep hormones. If possible, cap screen usage at least 30 minutes before bedtime. While many people like to keep devices on bedside tables, consider turning bedrooms into screen-free zones.
- Making it happen: Devices have become so important to children, they may not realize the negative effects they are having on their health, making

getting kids to actually put down devices often easier said than done. In fact, kids will often defy verbal limitations and warnings. Fortunately, parents can get a little outside assistance in making rules stick. One solution is OurPact, a screen monitoring app that allows parents to set online schedules. Using the app, parents can limit app access automatically for recurring activities like school or bedtime, and can block or grant internet access on a child's device. They can even view screenshots of kids' digital activity, helping them swiftly address usage issues like unsafe content and cyberbullying. To learn more or download, visit OurPact.com.

While the new normal has meant an unavoidable uptick in screen time, parents can help kids strike a healthy balance.

Economy

Annual Christmas Price Index reflects pandemic's economic impacts

In a year marked by unprecedented shocks to the economy, PNC's 37th annual Christmas Price Index (CPI) accounts for the pandemic's impact on the cost of purchasing presents from the classic holiday song, "The 12 Days of Christmas."

A lighthearted take on the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Consumer Price Index, which measures the average change in prices for goods and services over time, the PNC version applies analysis to procuring "True Love's" 12 gifts. This year's index includes ad-

justments for the reality that many live performances have been cancelled.

PNC calculated the 2020 price tag for the PNC Christmas Price Index at just \$16,168.10, a considerable decrease of \$22,825.45 or -58.5% over last year's cost, with a third of the items literally not available for purchase this year.

"In response to these unusual times, we took a non-traditional view in calculating the Christmas Price Index," said Amanda Agati, chief investment strategist for The PNC

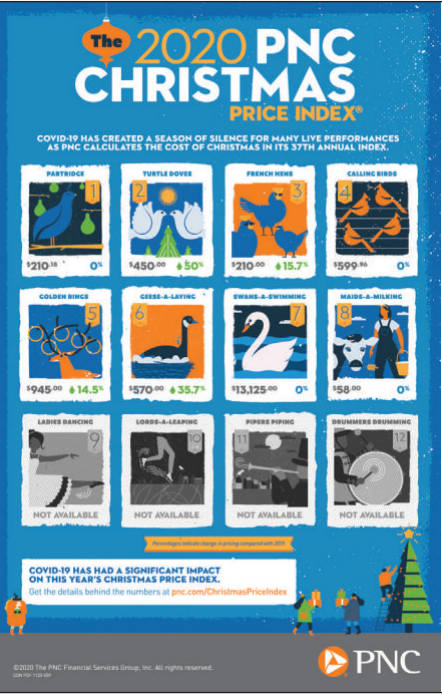
Financial Services Group. "The biggest impact has been for live performances, which are mostly unavailable. While some performing arts groups are engaging through virtual presentations, it's a silent night at most symphonies and the lights have dimmed on many dance companies, as reflected in this year's significant drop in PNC's CPI data."

The annual tradition also includes calculating the "True Cost of Christmas," which is the total cost of items when repeating all the song's verses. Purchasing all 364 gifts will

require \$105,561.80, which means that spreading cheer throughout 2020 costs 38% less than in 2019, given the exclusion of live performances.

For the full report, along with lessons consumers can learn from the pandemic's economic impact, visit, pnc.com.

2020 has been anything but conventional for consumers, the markets and the economy, and this year's Christmas Price Index most notably highlights the change with a season of silence for many live performers.



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