



## Screen Time

Children are curious about their world and about learning. They use a variety of tools as they explore—markers, pretend play materials, blocks, music, etc. Today, technology and interactive media digital tools are becoming more and more common as tools for children’s learning and creative expression.

Though children learn best when they are interacting with the world around them in hands-on ways, digital tools and media can spark meaningful learning experiences. Family routines are also filled with technology today: these routines offer your child opportunities to watch, play, and learn with siblings, parents, and other family members. Set limits and make informed decisions regarding the use of technology and media for your child. This will help him learn to use digital tools wisely and give him a fun way to interact and learn.

- Research recommends that parents limit screen time to fewer than two hours per day for children ages 2 through 5. Screen time consists of television, video, digital media, video games, mobile media, cell phones, and the Internet.
- Watch age-appropriate content with your child.
  - Be deliberate and knowledgeable about what she watches.
  - Plan ahead what she will watch—don’t assume something appropriate will be on.
  - Interact with your child about what she is viewing.
  - Set time limits before viewing.
- New media can offer opportunities for learning. Children can take and view pictures on smartphones or iPads, and parents and teachers can share photos of your child’s accomplishments and favorite people, places, and activities.
- New child-friendly tablet interfaces make it easy for your child to “read” favorite books to you or on his own. Use tablets as part of a long car ride or in your daily routine, but not as a daily substitute for sitting with your child and reading together.
- Watching together can be a great learning and bonding experience, especially if you talk with your child about what you are seeing, listening to, and feeling as you are watching. Watching any form of media should not take the place of play and real-life experiences.
- Screens should not be part of your child’s nighttime routine. Research shows that TV and videos are more likely to keep children awake and contribute to sleep interruptions.
- Young children have a hard time distinguishing what is real from what is not real. They might be frightened by images or music that don’t bother adults—or seem unfazed by things that adults find disturbing. Don’t assume something is “over his head,” and always be sure of what’s on the screen your child is watching.

- If your child accidentally sees something scary (e.g., on the news), take the time to listen to and acknowledge his fears and reassure him that you will keep him safe.
- Limit exposure to advertising. Look for viewing opportunities without ads. Help your child recognize when something is a commercial and answer her questions about products she sees.
- Prepare your child for what he will watch, how many shows he will watch, and what he will do when his screen time is up. This will help him transition from the video to another activity.
- Make your viewing active. Talk about what you watch both during and after the show. Sing the songs together or act out favorite parts of the story, show, or game.
- Think of what you are viewing as another way to have a conversation with your child. Talk about what the characters are doing or feeling. Help him relate what you are watching to what's happening in his own life.
- You are in control of the device. If you want your child to engage with the device at a restaurant, on a long car ride, etc., make sure the content is appropriate, prepare her for how many shows she will be watching, and relax!
- Plan for breaks from the device at particular times. If at a restaurant, stop the device when the food is at the table and engage your child in conversation; if on a long car ride, make some stops to get out of the car, walk a bit, talk about where you are going or what you are seeing.
- Download applications (apps) for on-the-go learning. Preview the app before giving it to your child to make sure the content is appropriate and the user level is right. Your child will get frustrated if he's not able to work the device or if the level of the game is too difficult for him.
- Digital devices can be used to build upon your child's interests. For example, if your child is interested in pandas, she can watch a live panda at a zoo with a Panda Cam app.
- Play games using keyboards and phone pads to help build your child's math and literacy skills as well as skills using digital tools. Name a letter and see if he can find that letter on your keyboard. Hold up three fingers and ask him to point to the number that tells how many fingers you are holding up.
- Use video chat programs like Skype and gChat, smartphone videos, or cell phone calls to allow your child to talk face-to-face with relatives or friends who may live far away.