



HIGHLIGHTS FOR FAMILIES WITH INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Smartphones. Tablets. E-books, and more. The explosion of new screen devices offers both possibilities and challenges for families today. When should children be introduced to screens? How much time should they spend with screens? Is screen time helpful or harmful to children's brain development? Does content matter? There's not much research about new technologies and children—but there are some things we do know.

In order to thrive, young children need healthy food, shelter, and plenty of positive interactions with the people who love them. They benefit from being talked to, read to, and played with. Children learn best from hands-on, creative play. They also need time outside and with nature. These early experiences build important life skills like creativity, compassion, curiosity, and constructive problem solving.

DID YOU KNOW?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends avoiding screen time for children under 2 and suggests limiting screen time for children 2 and older to no more than 1-2 hours per day.

There's no evidence that screen time helps children under 2. Some studies show that it can even delay learning new words and upset babies' sleep. For children over 3, *limited use* of thoughtfully produced screen media can contribute to learning, especially when a caring adult is involved.

WHY AVOID OR LIMIT SCREEN TIME? RESEARCH TELLS US:

- The more time our youngest children spend with screens, the less time they spend interacting with caring adults and in hands-on, creative play—2 activities proven to be important for learning.
- Too much screen time is linked to learning, attention, and social problems, childhood obesity and sleep disturbances. It also exposes kids to lots of harmful advertising.
- Screen media can be habit-forming. Young children who spend more time with screens have a harder time turning them off when they get older.
- Even a little exposure to violent, sexualized, stereotyped, or commercialized content can be harmful to children.

SUGGESTIONS

- Make sure that children have plenty of time for hands-on, creative and active play. They also often love helping with everyday activities, including gardening, baking, and folding laundry.
- If you choose to use screens with your children, set rules early on about when, where, what, and how much. Screen activities with obvious end-points can help a lot with time limits.
- Remove televisions and other devices from children's bedrooms.
- Turn off screens when they are not in use. Parents talk less to children when background television is on and it interrupts the kind of play essential for learning.
- Take stock of your own screen time—remember that you are your child's most powerful role model.

DID YOU KNOW?

Worries about screen time are growing. Many parents postpone introducing their children to screens or are considerably reducing or eliminating screen time.

DID YOU KNOW?

For preschoolers, watching just 20 minutes of a fast-moving cartoon show can have a negative impact on attention, the ability to delay gratification, self-control, and problem solving.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Will my child fall behind if she is not introduced to digital technology at an early age?

There is no evidence that using screen technologies in early childhood means children will be better at them when they're older. Hands-on exploration and play, however, are important for later problem-solving skills in engineering and other fields.

DID YOU KNOW?

Electronic books in which screen images respond to touch are less likely than traditional books to bring about the kind of adult-child interactions that promote literacy.

Are interactive apps better for young children than TV or videos which are passive?

Not necessarily. Any app or digital activity can be passive when they only allow programmed responses or preset choices. No app or other media is as responsive and interactive as a live teacher, parent, or playmate.

What about educational apps and videos? Aren't they good for children?

Be skeptical about educational claims—companies are rarely held accountable for them. Be especially wary of any program or app for children under 2. For older kids, consider whether the app or video claims to teach something that would actually be better learned through hands-on experiences.

DID YOU KNOW?

A recent study found that only 2% of the 10 best-selling apps for young children in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, could be considered open-ended, creative programs.

RESOURCES

- For citations and endnotes for this sheet and/or to download the full guide, *Facing the Screen Dilemma: Young Children, Technology, and Early Education*, please visit www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screendilemma.
- Access TRUCE Action Guides that help parents deal with screens and promote play in supportive and user-friendly ways at www.truceteachers.org.
- Check out Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood at www.commercialfreechildhood.org to learn more about the commercialization of childhood and what you can do about it.
- Find out more about the Alliance for Childhood at www.allianceforchildhood.org. The Alliance is an organization that promotes policies and practices that support children's healthy development, love of learning, and joy in living.
- Learn about celebrating Screen-Free Week at www.screenfree.org.