FACING THE SCREEN DILEMMA:
YOUNG CHILDREN, TECHNOLOGY, AND EARLY EDUCATION

A SUMMARY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS

Modern science confirms what the early childhood community has known for years—that infants, toddlers, and young children learn through exploring with their whole bodies and need plenty of face-to-face interactions. Yet from infancy, children spend increasing amounts of time with screen technologies and studies show that the more time young children spend with screens, the less time they spend engaged in interactions with caring adults and in hands-on, creative play.

Given the preponderance of screens in the lives of many young children, it is crucial that early childhood professionals make thoughtful, evidence-based decisions about how, why, whether, and when to incorporate screen technologies into their settings. The following information and recommendations, including citations, can be found in more detail in *Facing the Screen Dilemma* (all page numbers cited here refer back to the guide).

WHAT RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT SCREEN TIME AND YOUNG CHILDREN

EXCESSIVE SCREEN TIME BEGINS EARLY ON (p. 5)

On any given day…

- 29% of babies under 1 year watch TV and videos for an average of 90 minutes.
- 64% of children 12-24 months watch TV and videos averaging just over 2 hours.

SCREEN TIME INCREASES AS CHILDREN GROW (p. 7)

Preschoolers spend as much as 4.1 to 4.6 hours per day with screen media.

- There's scant evidence that screen time is beneficial for babies and some evidence that it may be linked to delayed language acquisition and irregular sleep patterns. (pp. 5, 8)
- For children over 3, studies show that *limited exposure* to thoughtfully constructed media can have benefits, especially when a caring adult is actively involved. (p. 5)
- Children of any age can be harmed by violent, sexualized, stereotyped, or commercialized content—no matter how little time they spend with *sc*reens. (p. 5, 19)
- Neuro-imaging and behavioral studies show that screen media can be habit-forming. The more time young children spend with screens, the more difficulty they have turning off screens when they become older. In one survey, 1 in 4 children ages 8 to 18 said that they "felt addicted" to video games. (p. 7)
- Research links many of the health and social problems facing children today, including those listed below, to hours spent with screens (pp. 7-9):
  - Erosion of creative play and less interaction with caring adults
  - Compromised learning, school performance, and peer relationships
  - Childhood obesity and sleep disturbance
  - Extensive exposure to harmful commercials
- As yet, there is no evidence that introducing screen technologies in early childhood means children will be more adept when they're older. (p. 9)

www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screendilemma

1. **Make intentional decisions about technology.** If you use technology in the classroom, understand why and what you hope to accomplish with it. If you do not use it, understand why you are making that choice. The nature of the content children experience and the amount of time they spend with screens are important considerations. (p. 17)

2. **Choosing to be screen-free is a viable option.** While the use of technology in early childhood settings is increasingly common, choosing a screen-free, play-based setting for young children remains a pedagogically sound choice. (p. 19)

3. **Whether or not you use technology in your setting, learn how technology can affect children's development and learning, and take this into account in your work with them.** Children's exposure to screens at home and elsewhere will influence their classroom learning and behavior—for instance, their interests, what they know and want to know, how they play, and what they want to play. (p. 11)

4. **Work closely with parents**. Understand how much screen time and what content children are using at home to help you make informed decisions about screen technologies in your classroom. Help parents develop fun, affordable alternatives to screen time and set limits on how much screens are used. (p. 19)

5. **Know the public health guidelines for screen time in early childhood settings**. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Public Health Association, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education recommend the following in child care and educational programs (p. 10):
   o Media viewing and computer use should not be permitted for children younger than 2 years.
   o For older children, total media time, including time at home, should be no more than 1-2 hours per day. In early childhood education and care settings, media should be used for education or physical activity only, and should not exceed more than 30 minutes a week.
   o Computer use should be limited to no more than 15-minute increments except for homework and for children who require use of assistive and adaptive computer technology.
   o Media viewing should not be allowed during meal or snack time.
   o Parents/guardians should be informed if screen media are used in your program.
   o Any screen media used should be free of advertising and brand placement.

RESOURCES

Download the entire *Facing the Screen Dilemma* guide at www.commercialfreechildhood.org/screendilemma.

Connect with other educators who are facing the screen dilemma by visiting our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/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's website to learn more about the commercialization of childhood and what you can do to get involved at www.commercialfreechildhood.org

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.