

Tips for Families:

Screens and the Early Years

Screens and digital devices are a part of life for many families – especially since the pandemic.

While experts don't recommend any screen time for children under two years old, and no more than one

hour a day for kids aged two to five, many families find this difficult to follow. Remember: your child learns best from face-to-face time with you. While screens can't replace that, they can have some benefits if you use them right.

Tips for using technology at home:

Create rules

- Plan when, why, how long and who will be using screens. *"Let's watch this show after lunch so we can learn about ocean animals. We can keep it on for 20 minutes."*



- Set "screen-free" times. During these times, no one in the family uses a device

- Turn off screens and leave devices aside for at least one hour before bed. Looking at screens right before bed can affect the hormone that helps a child fall asleep



Limit the time you are on a device when around your babies and kids

- Put away your device during mealtimes or when you are playing with your child. Kids copy the adults in their lives, so if you are using a device, they will want to use one too.



- Avoid keeping the TV on in the background

- Only turn on the TV for one show and then turn it off when the show ends.



Choose appropriate shows, games and apps

- Connect what is happening on the screen to real life. *"We went swimming in a lake like those kids!"*



- Ask questions, such as "What just happened?", "What do you think will happen next?"

- Talk about what you see. *"The astronauts are on a big rocket ship!"*



Having the TV on all the time can affect your child's language and attention skills. It can also distract you both from spending face-to-face time together, which is so important for learning. Turn off the TV when the news or another program meant for adults and older children comes on.

Please visit www.childrensliteracy.ca for more tips!



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Do you have these questions?:

Screens and the Early Years

Question

Answer

Will screen time make my child develop language skills slower?

It depends on their age. Children under 12 months who are exposed to a lot of screen time have been shown to have more language delays. Young kids do not learn much from screens at this age. They learn the most from adults in real life, so be sure to read, speak, sing, play and cuddle together!



Is it okay if my baby uses screens to video chat with family?

Yes. Talking with family members over video chats can help build relationships, particularly if they are unable to see them in person. Even babies can pick up when an adult is talking directly to them. They get more from a grandparent talking to them on a video chat than from hearing a character talk on a show.



Does it help a child calm down when they spend time quietly looking at a screen?

No. When a child is given screen time to calm down, it could lead to problems with learning to set limits and control their feelings. Studies show kids who have lots of screen time in early childhood tend to have a harder time regulating their behaviour.



Is reading an e-book as good as reading a printed book?

It's hard to know. Some studies say both e-books and printed books support early learning. Other studies say printed books are better at teaching early reading and language skills and help a child and adult to bond. Enjoy e-books with your child if you prefer them, but don't leave printed books behind – they have so many benefits!



With printed books:

- Children learn important skills like turning pages and figuring out how to hold a book the right way up
- Children focus on the meaning of the story. They can point to words or pictures without distractions like sound effects or animations
- Parents can focus on talking to the child about the story rather than about how to use the device

What is good about screen time?

Screens can support learning if they are used correctly and infrequently, and if an adult is involved. Screens are not a substitute for face-to-face time with you. Television shows that are well-designed and age appropriate can help your child learn skills if they are over two years old. Shows can introduce important topics like learning about different cultures. Interactive apps, when used in combination with an adult's participation, can help a child build early literacy by giving them a chance to practice recognizing letters, sounds and words.



For more information on early literacy and language development, please visit the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation at www.childrensliteracy.ca



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