

Healthy Digital Media Use Habits for Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers



Media in all forms, including TV, computers, and smartphones can affect how children feel, learn, think, and behave. However, parents (you) are still the most important influence.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) encourages you to help your children develop healthy media use habits early on. Read on to learn more.

Media Use Guidelines for Young Children

For children younger than 2:

- Media use should be very limited and only when an adult is standing by to co-view, talk, and teach. For example, video-chatting with family along with parents.

For children 18 to 24 months, if you want to introduce digital media:

- Choose high-quality programming.
- Use media together with your child.
- Avoid solo media use.

For children 2 to 5 years of age:

- Limit screen use to no more than 1 hour per day.
- Find other activities for your children to do that are healthy for their bodies and minds.
- Choose media that is interactive, non-violent, educational, and prosocial.
- Co-view or co-play with your children.

American Academy of Pediatrics Media Use Guidelines for Young Children

Age	Description	Media Use Guidelines
Younger than 2	Children younger than 2 learn and grow when they explore the physical world around them. Their minds learn best when they interact and play with parents, siblings, caregivers, and other children and adults.	For children younger than 2, <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Media use should be very limited and only when an adult is standing by to co-view, talk, and teach. For example, video-chatting with family along with parents.
	Children younger than 2 have a hard time understanding what they see on screen media and how it relates to the world around them. However, children 15 to 18 months of age can learn from high-quality educational media, IF their parents play or view with them and reteach the lessons.	For children 18 to 24 months, if you want to introduce digital media, <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose high-quality programming.• Use media together with your child.• Avoid solo media use.
2 to 5 years of age	At 2 years of age, many children can understand and learn words from live video-chatting. Young children can listen to or join a conversation with their parents. Children 3 to 5 years of age have more mature minds, so a well-designed educational program such as Sesame Street (in moderation) can help children learn social, language, and reading skills.	For children 2 to 5 years of age, <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limit screen use to no more than 1 hour per day.• Find other activities for your children to do that are healthy for their bodies and minds.• Choose media that is interactive, non-violent, educational, and prosocial.• Co-view or co-play with your children.

What About Apps and Digital Books?

Most apps advertised as "educational" aren't proven to be effective and they don't encourage co-viewing or co-play that help young children learn. Also, most educational apps target rote skills, such as ABCs and shapes. These skills are only one part of school readiness. The skills young children need to learn for success in school (and life) such as impulse control, managing emotions, and creative, flexible thinking, are best learned through unstructured and social play with family and friends in the real world.

Digital books ("eBooks") that have lots of sound and visual effects can sometimes distract children, who then "miss the story" and don't learn as well as they would from a print book.

If you plan to read e-books to your children:

- Choose e-books that don't have too many "bells and whistles."
- Read e-books with your children (parent-child interaction around books is one of the most important factors to a child's success at reading and literacy).

Why Limit Media Use?

Overuse of digital media may place your child at risk of:

- **Not enough sleep.** Young children with more media exposure or who have a TV, computer, or mobile device in their bedrooms [sleep](#) less and fall asleep later at night. Even babies can be overstimulated by screens and miss the sleep they need to grow.
- **Delays in learning and social skills.** Children who watch too much TV in infancy and preschool years can show [delays](#) in attention, thinking, language, and social skills. One of the reasons for the delays could be because they interact less with parents and family. Parents who keep the TV on or focus on their own digital media miss precious opportunities to interact with their children and help them learn. See [Parents of Young Children: Put Down Your Smartphones](#).
- **Obesity.** Heavy media use during preschool years is linked to weight gain and [risk of childhood obesity](#). Food advertising and snacking while watching TV can promote obesity. Also, children who overuse media are less apt to be active with healthy, physical play.
- **Behavior problems.** Violent content on TV and screens can contribute to [behavior problems](#) in children, either because they are scared and confused by what they see, or they try to mimic on-screen characters.

Other Tips for Parents, Families & Caregivers:

- **Do not feel pressured to introduce technology early.** Media interfaces are intuitive and children can learn quickly.
- **Monitor children's media.** For example, know what apps are used or downloaded. Test apps before your child uses them, play together, and ask your child what he or she thinks about the app.
- **Turn off TVs and other devices when not in use.** Background media can distract from parent-child interaction and child play, which are both very important in child language and social-emotional development.

- **Keep bedrooms, mealtimes, and parent-child playtimes screen free and unplugged for children and parents.** Turn off phones or set to "do not disturb" during these times.
- **Avoid exposure to devices or screens 1 hour before bedtime.** Remove devices from bedrooms before bed.
- **Avoid using media as the only way to calm your children.** Although media may be used to soothe children, such as during a medical procedure or airplane flight, using media as a strategy to calm could lead to problems with a child's own ability with limit setting and managing emotions. Ask your child's doctor for help if needed.
- **[Develop a Family Media Use plan](#) for you and your family.**
- **Remember that your opinion counts.** TV, video-game, and other media producers, and sponsors pay attention to the views of the public. Let a TV station know if you like a program, or contact video game companies if the content is too violent. For more information, visit the [Federal Communications Commission \(FCC\) website](#).
- **Encourage your school and community to advocate for better media programs and for healthier habits.** For example, organize a "Screen-Free Week" in your town with other parents, teachers, and neighbors.

Additional Information from HealthyChildren.org:

- [How to Make a Family Media Use Plan](#)
- [Healthy Sleep Habits: How Many Hours Does Your Child Need?](#)
- [How Virtual Violence Impacts Children's Behavior: Steps for Parents](#)
- [10 No-Cost, Screen-Free Activities to Play with Your Preschooler](#)
- [Obesity Prevention: AAP Policy Explained](#)

Last Updated 10/6/2016

Source Digital Media and Your Young Children: TV, Computers, Smartphones, and Other Screens
(Copyright © 2016 American Academy of Pediatrics)

The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.