

# Parenting Together

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## Screen Time for Children: A Balancing Act

With screens virtually everywhere, monitoring a child's screen time can be challenging. To complicate matters, some screen time can be educational for children as well as support their social development. So how do you manage your child's screen time? Read on to learn some information & advice on guiding your child's use of screens and media.

## The Problem with Screen Time

Unstructured playtime is more valuable for a young child's developing brain than electronic media. Children younger than age 2 are more likely to learn and remember information from a live interaction than they are from a video.

By age 2, children can benefit from some types of screen time, such as programming with music, movement and stories. By watching together, you can help your child understand what he, she, or they see and apply it in real life. Passive screen time shouldn't replace reading, playing or problem-solving.

As your child grows, keep in mind that too much or poor quality screen time has been linked to:

- Obesity
- Irregular/shorter sleep
- Behavioral problems
- Loss of social skills
- Violence
- Less time for play



## Creating Screen Time Rules

The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages media use, except for video chatting, by children younger than 18 to 24 months. They recommend if you introduce digital media to children ages 18 to 24 months, make sure it's high quality and avoid letting your child watch alone. For children ages 2 to 5, the AAP recommends limiting screen time to one hour a day of high-quality programming.

As children grow, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work as well as when they are under 2 years of age. You'll need to decide how much media to let your child use each day and what's appropriate.

One idea is to apply the same rules to your child's real and virtual environments. In both areas, teach kindness, play with your child, be involved, and know their friends & what they do together. Also, keep in mind that the quality of the media your child is exposed to is more important than the type of technology or amount of time spent. Here are some ideas to help you ensure quality screen time for your children:

- Preview programs, games and apps before allowing your child to view or opt to play with them.
- Seek out interactive options that engage your child, rather than those that just require pushing and swiping or staring at the screen.
- Use parental controls to block or filter internet content.
- Make sure your child is close by during screen time so that you can supervise their activities and engage together.
- Ask your child regularly what programs, games and apps they have played with during the day.
- When watching programming with your child, discuss what you're watching and educate him or her about advertising and commercials.

Another tip is to avoid fast-paced programming (which young children have a hard time understanding), apps with a lot of distracting content, and, of course, violent media. It is also a very good idea to eliminate advertising on apps, since young children have trouble telling the difference between ads and factual information.

## Encouraging Digital Literacy

At some point, your child is bound to be exposed to content that you haven't approved and/or devices without internet filters. Talk to your child about the situations that could occur and the behavior you expect.

Encourage your child to think critically about what they see on their screens. Ask your child to consider whether everything on the internet is true. Does your child know how to tell if a website is trustworthy? Help your child understand that media are made by humans with points of view. Explain that many types of technology collect data to send users ads or to make money.

## Setting Limits for Older Children

Set reasonable limits for your child's screen time, especially if your child's

use of screens is hindering involvement in other activities. Consider these tips:

- Prioritize unplugged, unstructured playtime.
- Create tech-free zones or times, such as during mealtimes and certain times of day.
- Set and enforce daily or weekly screen time limits and curfews, such as no exposure to devices or screens one hour before bedtime.
- Consider using apps that control the length of time a child can use a device.
- Require children to charge their devices out of bedrooms at night.
- Keep screens out of your child's bedroom altogether if possible.
- Limit your own screen time.
- Eliminate background TV.

## Teaching Appropriate Behavior

Online relationships and social media have become a major part of adolescent life. Experts suggest that it's OK for your teen to be a part of these worlds — as long as they understand appropriate behavior. Explain what's allowed and what's not, such as cyberbullying, sexting, and sharing personal information online. Teach your child not to send or share anything online that

they would not want the entire world to see for eternity. No matter how smart or mature you feel your child is, monitor their online and social media behavior. Your child is bound to make mistakes using media. Talk to your child and help them learn from these mistakes.

In addition to everything discussed thus far, and perhaps one of the most important things you can do is to set an example. Consider that your child is watching you for cues on when it's OK to use screens and how to use them.

Managing your child's use of screens and media will be an ongoing challenge. But by developing household rules — and revisiting them as your child grows — you can help ensure a safe experience.

### The Book Nook

*Doug Unplugged*  
by Dan Yaccarino

*150 actividades para jugar sin pantallas : para que los niños descubran el mundo real*  
by Asia Citro

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[orparenting.org](http://orparenting.org)

## References

Screen Time and Children

[https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx)

What Does Too Much Screen Time Do to Children's Brains?

<https://healthmatters.nyp.org/what-does-too-much-screen-time-do-to-childrens-brains/>

Screen Time Guidelines for Babies and Toddlers

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/screentime-baby-todd.html>

Screen Time for Kids; How Much is Too Much?

<https://newsroom.osfhealthcare.org/screen-time-for-kids-how-much-is-too-much/>