

Smartphone and Tablet Screen Time: Good or Bad for Children

By Kathy Kinsner

The American Academy of Pediatrics released new recommendations for children's use of "screen media." Is screen time educational, distracting, or some combination of the two?



Screens Are Everywhere

Everywhere you look, there's a screen with bright pictures and interesting noises—phones and computers, tablets and TVs. You may wonder if all this technology is good for babies and toddlers. Is it educational, distracting, or some combination of the two?

It turns out that's a great question to ask.

Recommended Screen Time

The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommendations for children's use of "screen media." Here's what the Academy says is best for each age:

- **Birth through 18 months**
Avoid all screen media—phones, tablets, TVs and computers. (It's OK to video chat with grandparents and far-away friends.)
- **18 months to 2 years**
It is OK to introduce young children to high-quality children's media if you watch it with them and help them understand what they're seeing.
- **2 to 5 years**
Limit screen use to one hour a day of high-quality programs designed for children. Watch with your children; explain what they're seeing and how it applies to the world around them.

Tips on Using Media to Support Early learning

- **Your child learns most from her experiences in the real world.** She learns by exploring, using her whole body and all her senses. A bird hopping along the sidewalk, a crackly leaf or a juicy red apple are easier for her to understand and remember than the objects

she sees on a screen. Help your child connect what she sees on-screen with what she sees in the real world. Point out and name objects in real life that she's seen on the TV, phone or tablet.

- **Your child learns most from his interactions with you.** The conversations you have with your child are far more educational than mobile apps—even those designed for learning. Your child points to something that interests him, and you talk about it. "Yes, that's a duck. What does the duck say?" You describe the new thing in relation to something that interested him the day before or the day before that. "Remember when you went to the park with Grandma? Did you feed the ducks?" Learning is connected to the feeling of being loved and supported as you discover the world together. Watch TV or use media with your child. Ask questions and talk about what you're watching.
- **Your young child gets distracted by television, even when it's on in the background.** TVs offer loud voices, flashing lights and noise! Young children already have to sort out and make sense of so much information. Focusing is easier without the TV. Try to limit TV in the background when young children are playing and make sure to turn off the TV when no one is watching.
- **Your use of media shows your child what's important and valuable.** Everybody's got friends who are attached to their phones—texting, updating social media and watching videos. It's easy to feel left out or unimportant when the person across from you is looking down at a screen. This is not the message we intend to give our children, but it happens. The take-away? Shut off or silence your phone when you can. Use that time to connect with your child and experience the world together.

