



Screen Time and Young Children

Today, you can find TV shows and videos for any age—even babies. How much “screen time” is too much for babies and children under 5? How does screen time affect young children?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that parents discourage all screen time for children under age 2. AAP also suggests that preschool age children watch only good quality programs and not more than 1-2 hours a day.

Children under three have needs which cannot be met by TV, videos or computers. Their time is best spent interacting with adults, other children and toys.

TV, videos and computers can have negative effects on young children:

- Cognitive development: TV, videos and computers can pull a child away from two important ways of learning, exploring and looking at books. He becomes a passive viewer instead of an active learner.
- Social development: The more time he spends in front of a screen, the less time is spent playing with others which leads to missing out on

the benefits of developing the social skills he will need throughout his lifetime.

- Nutrition and fitness: Children who spend hours in front of a screen may not get enough exercise. Seeing junk food commercials may also contribute to children’s poor eating habits. Recent research suggests that reducing screen time can lower a child’s risk for obesity.
- Behavior and attitude: Parents and caregivers may not approve of many things videos, TV and computers can teach children. Some children learn inappropriate language. Violent programs may be linked to bad dreams, aggression and fears about being hurt. TV shows and videos may have sexual content that is inappropriate for children. Programs and advertising can push children to put too much value on having things.

What you can do:

- Turn off the TV and computer. Children can have fun and learn in other ways. Parents may want to ask about a caregiver’s policy on TV, videos and computers.
- Preview TV and computer programs and videos. No rating system is per-

fect. Previewing lets you know exactly what your child will see.

- Allow minimal and mostly educational screen time. High quality informative videos and programs can be as engaging as cartoons.
- Avoid using TV, videos or the computer as a babysitter.
- Watch with your child. Ask questions and make comments that help build “media literacy.” For example, say, “That monster looks scary, but it’s just a person who is pretending.”
- Avoid making TV, videos and computer the center of your family’s life. Keep the TV and computer out of children’s bedrooms and playrooms and keep them off during meals.
- Make a screen time schedule with your child.
- With your child, plan ways to learn, play and relax away from the screens.

If scheduling this time becomes difficult or you are struggling with parenting issues, call your county health department and ask to speak to a Child Guidance professional.

Sources: Illinois Early Learning Project www.illinoisearlylearning.org

Child Guidance Where Families Find Solutions



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