

Five tips on screen use and young children

For years, experts in health and child development have advised parents that children under the age of two should not have significant exposure to screens and electronic devices. This is controversial but seemingly sound advice, rooted in the reality that very young children need the positive effects of real-world experiences like a hug from a parent or a trip to the park as they grow. Even so, in today's increasingly digital and screen-focussed world, the prospect of keeping a child from spending any time at all looking at screens for two whole years can seem daunting. Many parents of young children, then, may be relieved to hear that new research is suggesting that the best way to handle screen use for young kids is a pragmatic approach based on the type of screen use and the needs of the individual child. Here are our five top tips on screens and young children.

1. **Set sensible limits.** With babies and toddlers, it's important to structure and regulate screen time. Young children sleep through quite a bit of the day, so if you do allow some screen use it's crucial to make sure their waking hours aren't consumed by staring at screens.
2. **Keep a good balance.** Setting limits on screen time is a great first step, but the way your young children spend the rest of their time will also be important. Babies and toddlers learn better through real world experiences, and as parents already know, they require lots of in-person attention! Make sure that young kids still get lots of chances to play, explore and interact in real life, away from screens.
3. **Choose appropriate media.** It may seem obvious, but if your toddler or young child is allowed to watch TV, the content should be appropriate for their age group. It's tempting to assume that very young children might not even understand violent or inappropriate imagery, but research has found a correlation between exposure to violent content and sleep problems in children aged three to five. Even children's programming aimed at older kids might be too fast-paced or confusing for toddlers who may not yet understand silly plot lines or fantastical characters. If you allow very young children to watch TV, it should ideally be relatable, educational and not too fast-paced.
4. **Do things together.** The more very young children interact with parents, carers and other loved ones, the better – and screen time is no exception. Skyping with other family members and watching a children's TV show together while chatting about the plot are good examples of ways to help young children use screens in a productive way.
5. **Try not to worry too much.** Just like with any other aspect of parenting, it's almost impossible to get everything right. In today's digital world, it can be really hard to prevent children from spending too much time around screens, or to make sure they're only exposed to age-appropriate media. There are some important guidelines to keep in mind with young children and screen use, but don't panic if you slip up occasionally.