Screen time

We live in a digital world and most children will be exposed to some screen time in their first five years. This could be through TV and DVDs, iPads, computers or electronic games. It could even be through the apps on your mobile phone.

When it's used thoughtfully, screen time is a great opportunity for everyday learning

Watching TV and using the internet can build a child's sense of belonging to a larger world. They learn about people and places different to their own; they see people at work and play doing new and exciting things. They learn how to find out about things they are interested in and curious about.

Digital technology can support learning

Watching high quality and age appropriate TV or websites gives children the chance to hear stories, sing songs, learn rhymes and play word games. Screen time can support children with additional needs, especially those who find communicating a challenge.

Some video games can even be an excuse for keeping your child active on a rainy day, if they encourage dance and movement.

But we can all have too much of a good thing!

If your child has lots of screen time, it could mean they're missing the chance to play, to imagine, to move, to create and explore. If they spend little time with real people they miss out on important social learning. Balance is essential between screen time and screen-free time.

How can I make the most of my child's screen time?

Share screen time with your child

- If you have a toddler, they will love it if you roar like a lion and spin like an autumn leaf along with the presenters on TV.

- Use what you see on TV or the internet for everyday learning or meaningful conversations: I've been to Russia. Would you like to find it on a map with me?

- Use the internet to build on your child's curiosity or interest in particular things. If your child loves spiders, look at the many beautiful photos of spider webs online. Find out which spider makes that type of web. Then take a camera and go in search of your own spider webs outside. Choose suitable shows, games and websites

- Be choosy about what your child watches on TV or the

computer. Can you see what sites your child is visiting? If they are using an app on your smart phone, what advertising will they see?

- Remember that young children don't know that images aren't real. Check for scary visuals or sounds, monsters, angry or cruel characters, and violence.

- If your child has regular screen time, keep the TV and computer in a shared family space.

- Choose apps carefully, not all apps in the education section are good quality. A lot of apps only require basic instructive drilling and practice. Seek apps that are more open ended and require thinking.

- Speak to your child's educators for advice on high-quality TV programs, DVDs, websites and electronic games.

Limit screen time to encourage play

- Limit screen time so that your child has plenty of opportunity for play. Some experts suggest that children under two shouldn't have any screen time and that children between two and five should be limited to an hour a day. In the end, your own family values will tell you
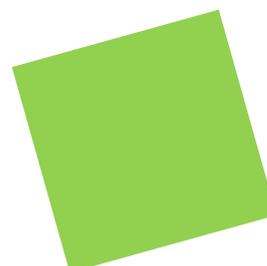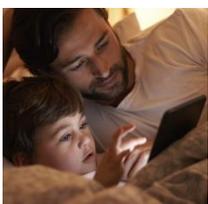
how much screen time you think is okay for your child.

- Lead by example! Limit your own screen time while your children are around.

The American academy of paediatrics recommends that parents:

- Limit the amount of total entertainment screen time to <1 to 2 hours per day.

- Discourage screen media exposure for children <2 years of age.

- Keep the TV set and Internet-connected electronic devices out of the child's bedroom.

- Monitor what media their children are using and accessing, including any Web sites they are visiting and social media sites they may be using.

- Watch TV, movies, and videos with children and teenagers, and use this as a way of discussing important family values.

- Model active parenting by establishing a family home use plan for all media. As part of the plan, enforce a mealtime and bedtime "curfew" for media devices, including cell phones.
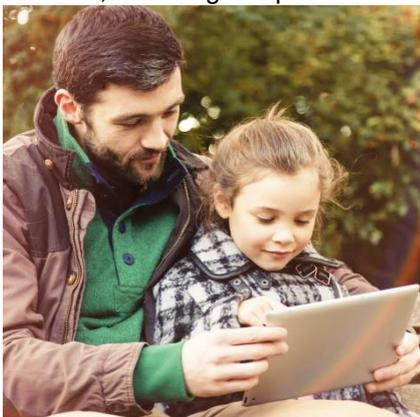
Establish reasonable but firm rules about mobile phones, texting, internet, and social media use.

You may also like to read

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- Everyday learning

  - Learning through play

  - Encouraging your child's strengths and interests

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