

Family Media Use – What You Should Know

What’s the problem with media use for young children?

Research shows that overuse of media for young children (ages 0-5) can lead to health concerns, including:

OBESITY

- Young children who overuse media are at risk for increased BMI and are more likely to experience weight gain later in childhood.
- For 2-year-olds, BMI increased for every hour per week of media consumed.

SLEEP

- Children and infants exposed to screen media in the evening sleep less at night than those without media exposure.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- Overuse of media is linked to cognitive, language, and social/emotional delays.
- This may result in part from decreases in parent-child interaction.

PARENTAL MEDIA USE

- Heavy parent use of mobile devices is associated with fewer verbal and nonverbal interactions and may lead to children acting out more often.
- Parental media use is a strong predictor of child media use.

What are the benefits of media use?

Not *all* media use is detrimental to young children’s development. Positive uses of media include:

SUPPORTING FAMILY CONNECTIONS AND TOGETHERNESS

- Co-viewing and co-playing – Watch, play and share together using high-quality content. Ask and answer questions and blend content into their daily lives.
- Children even younger than 18 months can use video chat along with parents to connect with distant family members.

PROMOTING SCHOOL READINESS

- High-quality digital apps, tools, and materials can support school readiness.
- Parental/family engagement is key.

Sources: www.healthychildren.org; American Academy of Pediatrics – www.aap.org



What should families know about media use for young children?

AGE-APPROPRIATE MEDIA USE FOR CHILDREN

Young children learn through hands-on exploration and connection with caregivers.

Under the age of 2 years, babies and toddlers don't learn from digital media as well as they do through playing with caregivers. At this age, they don't know how to connect what they see on a screen to the world around them.

- ❖ **Under 18 months** – Avoid using screen media other than video chatting with friends and relatives. At this age, children need an adult to help them understand what (and who) they are seeing and interacting with during video chats.
- ❖ **18 to 24 months** – If you introduce digital media, limit viewing time and choose high-quality programming that you watch together. Ask questions, talk about it, and help them understand what they're seeing.

Ages 2 to 5 years – Limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality media. Share media together, talk about what you are seeing, and find ways to connect it to the world around them.

Ages 6 and older – Continue the good habits you already started. Limit types of media and time spent using it. Be consistent with limits you set, and make sure media doesn't take the place of good sleep, physical activity, and other healthy behaviors.

ADULTS AS MEDIA MENTORS

Adult caregivers are mentors for children's use of technology and media. Media mentoring involves serving as a role model and making decisions about how children use media and where and when families will and won't use media.

How do I find high-quality and age-appropriate content?

These resources can help.

Common Sense Media

Family guides, top picks, reviews, and advice to support children's healthy use of technology

PBS Kids

Research-based, high-quality, educational games, apps, and content for young children, ages 2 and over

Sesame Street in Communities

Multi-media tools to support early childhood development for families of young children ages 0-6

Some quick tips for modeling healthy media use for children:

- ✓ Turn off TVs and other devices when not in use.
- ✓ Set regular media-free times together, such as dinnertime or while traveling.
- ✓ Create media-free spaces at home, such as bedrooms.
- ✓ Avoid screen time during the hour before bedtime to help children sleep well.
- ✓ Plan tech-free outings in your neighborhood or around town.
- ✓ Learn about activities you can do with materials you find around your home.
- ✓ Talk with children about respect and safety both online and offline.
- ✓ Make a family media use plan (www.healthychildren.org).