

# LIMITING SCREEN TIME

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends **keeping all screens off around babies and toddlers younger than 18 months**. They say a little screen time can be okay for older toddlers, and **children 2 and older** should get **no more than an hour of screen time per day**.

- **Language development:** Until they're about 2 1/2 years old, young children don't learn effectively just from watching something on a screen. Children as young as 12 months can learn new words from digital media IF their parents watch with them and continue to repeat and reinforce the new vocabulary. That's because babies and toddlers learn to speak by interacting with parents and caregivers, picking up on sounds, words, body language, and eye contact. Your child also needs quiet time to sit and babble and experiment with her voice.
- **Social and emotional development:** Babies learn to socialize by connecting face to face with their parents, but distracting digital screens can get in the way of that connection. One study found that when a TV was on in the background, parents were less likely to interact with their kids. There are also concerns that screens can lead to shorter attention spans and behavioral issues. Researchers have found that babies and toddlers who watch TV at such a young age may have a tougher time managing their emotions and comforting themselves when they're older.
- **Weight issues:** Many researchers have drawn a connection between too much screen time and obesity in preschool years and beyond. For example, one recent study found that toddlers' body mass index increased with every hour of screen time per week. For kids of all ages, it's important to keep moving because physical activity boosts physical development and encourages healthy habits.
- **Sleep problems:** Multiple studies have found that the more time children spend in front of a screen – particularly in the evening – the less sleep they get. This holds true even for infants as young as 6 months. This is especially troubling considering that young children need a lot of sleep to thrive: Babies 6 months and older need as much as 15 hours of sleep a day, and toddlers need up to 14 hours. The AAP warns against allowing any screens in a child's bedroom, noting that even small screens like phones and tablets have been linked to poor sleep quality. The light emitted by screens may delay melatonin release and actually make it harder to fall asleep. Watching something on a screen is stimulating and makes it harder for children to quiet down for sleep.





## Strategies for managing screen time at home

- **Set time limits:** Aim for less than an hour a day, or think about screen time per week instead of per day. On sick or rainy days, you might watch a movie together. On more active days, you can have no screen time at all. Permit screen use at key moments, like during your morning shower or evening meal prep.
- **Turn off the background TV:** Time with the TV on in the background still counts as screen time. Most babies and toddlers are perfectly happy to putter with books or toys. If you need some entertainment, put on music or an audio book instead.
- **Keep devices out of bedrooms:** Out of sight is out of mind, and as your child gets older, you'll be glad to have set boundaries.
- **Choose content that's age-appropriate:** When you do allow a little screen time, choose age-appropriate content that reinforces learning.
- **Talk with your child:** Share screen time with your child as much as possible and chat about what you're seeing and hearing. Asking questions and engaging with your child brings the most benefits.

**Be a good role model:** Even at a young age, your child is studying and imitating you. Set down your phone during meals and one-on-one time. If your toddler wants to play with your tablet, tell him it's a tool, not a toy.



## Strategies for limiting screen time away from home

- **Choose a daycare center or preschool** with a policy of no screen time.
- **Talk to your nanny, babysitter, or caregiver:** Be sure caregivers know and follow your family's rules about screens.
- **Talk to family and friends:** Let loved ones know your preferences, but also be flexible. If Grandpa has a football game on, or all the cousins are watching a silly YouTube video, it's okay to make an exception.
- **Talk to other parents:** Touch base before and after playdates. If your child has been playing on an iPad at a friend's home, plan for no screens for the rest of the day.
- **Pack fun alternatives:** For car trips or flights, travel with a "fun bag" of your child's favorite toys and books, so when she gets tired or impatient, you have other tools besides your phone or tablet to come to the rescue.