

Healthy screen use (0-6 years)

What is screen time?

Screen time is the time you spend watching TV or DVDs, using computers, playing video or hand-held computer games, or using tablets or smartphones.

Why are screen time limits important?

Child development experts recommend limiting children's daily screen time. This is because real-life interactions with you and others are much better for your child's wellbeing, learning and development.

Limits also help ensure screen time does not get in the way of sleep and important activities like physical play, reading, creative play like drawing, and social time with family and friends.

Set screen time limits according to the age of your child and your family's daily or weekly routine. For example, you might give your child more screen time on the weekend, or extra time to video-chat with a relative who lives overseas.

Limits do not mean you should stop your child from watching TV or playing video games because he uses screens at school or for homework.

The latest guidelines from the American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) suggest that:

- children under 18 months should avoid screen time, other than video-chatting.
- children aged 18 months to 2 years can watch or use high-quality programmes or apps if adults watch or play with them to help them understand what they are seeing.
- children aged 2-5 years should have no more than one hour a day of screen time with adults watching or playing with them.
- children aged 6 years and older should have consistent limits on the time they spend on electronic media and the types of media they use.

Tips to encourage healthy screen use in your child

If your child develops healthy screen time habits while he is young, these habits will help him make better choices about how to use his free time when he's older. Here's how you can get started on these habits with your young child.

- **Role-model healthy screen time habits.** Your child learns screen time habits from you, so use your screen time in the way you want your child to use his – for example, turn the TV off when you've finished watching a programme, and don't read texts on your phone if you're talking to someone in person.

- **Look for alternatives to distract your child in boring situations.** Try playing 'I spy' or drawing in situations like long car journeys or while waiting at the hairdressers. When you know you're going to be in these situations, you could try packing an activity bag with puzzles, books or drawing materials.
- **Balance screen time with other activities.** It is important to balance screen time with other activities that are good for your child's development, like lots of face-to-face creative play or physically active time with you and other carers. Encourage your child to play outside, draw and play creative games like puzzles.
- **Switch off the TV, computer and mobile phones at family mealtimes.** This helps even very young children to learn about socialising, communicating and using table manners.
- **Work out a way of marking when it's time to finish screen time** – for example, when it is dinner time or bath time, or the end of the programme. If you give your child a warning when it is almost time to stop, he will be more likely to cooperate. It will also help if you make time to help your child save what he is doing.



Recommended Reads

- [Unplugged parenting: how to raise happy, healthy children in the digital age](#)
- [Media moms & digital dads: a fact-not-fear approach to parenting in the digital age](#)
- [The Art of Screen Time: How Your Family Can Balance Digital Media and Real Life](#)