

# Media and Young Children: Topic of the Month

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Digital and traditional media are widely accessible in most homes and everywhere else people go. For many, there are very few times during the day when they aren't connected by some type of an electronic device. Media, in all forms, can affect the way children engage and develop. Discover ways to educate and support the families we serve to make smart media choices for their whole family.



## Background

Experts have recommended screen time be limited to no more than 2 hours per day for people over 5 years of age. The average American spends about 7 hours daily looking at a screen and an average of 3-4 hours on their phone. With computers, tablets, smart phones, and TVs being the prime source of news, entertainment, social connection, and general information these days, people are finding themselves face-to-face with more screens than ever.

In 1970, children began to regularly watch TV around 4 years of age. Today, children are growing up surrounded by digital media with interaction beginning as soon as 4 months of age! Children aged 2-4 years watch an average of 2-3 hours of screen time each day. Early research indicates there is reason for concern and a need for parental guidance with digital media use of any kind.

The *American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)* has reviewed the existing literature on television, videos, and mobile/interactive technology for their potential educational benefit and related health concerns for young children. The policy statement entitled [Media and Young Minds](#) outlines time limits based on age and content. The AAP emphasizes the importance of parent-child shared media use and of spending time in other developmental activities that do not involve screen time.

## AAP media use recommendations by age:

AGE	Recommendations	Reasons for Recommendations
0-18 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid use of screen media other than video-chatting with family along with parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research shows that infants and toddlers experience “video deficit”; they are developmentally unable to effectively transfer knowledge from a 2-dimensional screen to a 3-dimensional world.</li> <li>Children at this age are still developing cognitive, language, sensorimotor, and social-emotional skills.</li> <li>Development requires hands-on exploration and social interaction with trusted caregivers.</li> </ul>
18-24 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If digital media is introduced, it should be very limited.</li> <li>Solo use should be avoided.</li> <li>Parents should choose high-quality programs.</li> <li>Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children younger than 2 are still unable to understand what they see on a screen and how it relates to their world.</li> <li>Research has shown that toddlers can begin to learn new words from educational videos, but only if their parents watched with them and retaught the words.</li> <li>Parents can use videos as a guide to in-person teaching.</li> </ul>
2-5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limit screen time to no more than 1 hour per day of high-quality programming.</li> <li>Parents should co-view or co-play media with their children.</li> <li>Choose media that is interactive, non-violent, educational, developmentally appropriate, and prosocial.</li> <li>Find other activities besides media for children to do that are healthy for their bodies and minds too.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At age 2, many children can understand and learn words from live video-chatting and can join a parent in a video conversation with friends and family.</li> <li>Children 3-5 years of age have more mature minds and can begin to understand what they are viewing.</li> <li>Well-designed educational programs have been shown to improve cognitive, language, reading skills, and social outcomes for children when viewed in moderation.</li> </ul>

### Why limit media use?

Overuse of media at any age may affect health, well-being, and development. Research has shown the following negative effects when media access is not limited in young children.

### Delays in learning and social skills

Children who spend many hours watching TV or using other media in the 0–5-year age range may show delays in attention span, cognitive skills, language development, and social-emotional skills. It is thought that they interact less with parents and family, where these skills are developed.

Parents who are distracted by media have also been shown to have decreased interaction with their children, further affecting their development.

## Children with higher weight

Heavy media use in children is linked to high weight gain and a risk of childhood obesity. Children typically are less active when using media. Some contributing factors include exposure to food advertising, decreased activity, and increased snacking while watching TV.

## Behavior problems

Excessive screen time has been found to interfere with the ability to interpret and regulate emotional responses. It can lead to increases in anxiety, depression, and aggressive behavior. Children may be confused and saddened by what they are seeing, or they may try to mimic on-screen activity.

## Sleep

Children with screens in their bedroom (TV, computer/tablet, mobile devices) sleep less and fall asleep later at night. Babies can be overstimulated by screens, causing them not to fall asleep as quickly.

## Media recommendations for all ages

Limits to screen time should include each family member. That may look different depending on one's age but will be equally beneficial to the family unit as a whole. The following recommendations support healthy family viewing.

- Wait to introduce your child to media. Parents should not feel pressured to introduce media early fearing that their child will be “behind”. Children figure out technology quickly once they start using it.
- Co-viewing or co-playing media with children is recommended at all ages. Parents can help children understand what they are seeing and how to apply what they learn to the world around them.
- Parents should know what children are watching. Set boundaries early on and use parental controls to monitor child's use of media.
- Avoid fast-paced programs with lots of distracting or violent content. Children don't understand or process them as well.
- Turn off television and other devices when not in use and during mealtimes.

- Avoid using media as a way to calm a child or as a distractor. This can lead to children being unable to develop their own emotion regulation especially when they are alone.
- Keep bedrooms, mealtimes, and parent-child playtimes screen free for *adults and children*. Suggest that parents set the phone to “Do not Disturb” or simply shut it off during these times.
- No screens one hour before bedtime and no screens in the bedroom.
- Share media rules with other family members or caregivers to ensure consistency when you cannot be there.

## Tips for talking with parents about media use

We can encourage and support parents in setting healthy limits for their family by sharing facts and recommendations to help them make an informed choice about media use in and out of the home.

- **Start early.** Discuss recommended guidelines for media use within the first year. It’s much easier to set healthy limits from the beginning and plan for future use.
- **Discuss the developmental reasons.** Share why screen time is not recommended or should be limited at various ages. Help parents understand the reasons for this information.
- **Stress the importance of parent and child interaction.** Encourage non-media driven interactions and movement for [Happy, Healthy, Active](#) family time.
- **Set good examples.** Challenge parents to evaluate their own media use and how it might be affecting time spent interacting with their children and influencing their use.
- **If parents are interested, guide them towards setting some media use goals.** AAP has developed an online [Family Media Plan](#) tool to help families. Their [Media and Children Communication Toolkit](#) has printable posters available in English and Spanish that list media use guidelines and promotes online tools that can be used in the WIC clinic.

## Resources

[Beyond Screen Time: Help Your Kids Build Healthy Media Use Habits](#) (healthychildren.org, 2022)

[Media and Children](#) (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021)

[Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Child Development: An Updated Review and Strategies for Management](#) (Cureus, June 18, 2023)

[Screen Time and Children](#) (Psychiatry, 2020)

[What do we really know about kids and screens?](#) (American Psychological Association, 2022)

[18 Average Screen Time Statistics \[2023\]: How Much Screen Time Is Too Much?](#) (Flynn, 2023)

## Reference - Complete Listing of Hyperlinks:

## MEDIA AND YOUNG CHILDREN: TOPIC OF THE MONTH

[Media and Children](http://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/) ([www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/](http://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/media-and-children/))

[Happy, Healthy, Active](http://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/childactive.pdf)

([www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/childactive.pdf](http://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/nutrition/english/childactive.pdf))

[Family Media Plan](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx) ([www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx))

[Media and Children Communication Toolkit](http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Pages/Media-and-Children.aspx) ([www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Pages/Media-and-Children.aspx](http://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Pages/Media-and-Children.aspx))

[Beyond Screen Time: Help Your Kids Build Healthy Media Use Habits](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Healthy-Digital-Media-Use-Habits-for-Babies-Toddlers-Preschoolers.aspx?_gl=1*1480npy*_ga*MTkxMjYwMjcxNS4xNzAyNDgwMTU4*_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ*MTcwMjQ4MDE1OC4xLjEuMTcwMjQ4MDE5MS4wLjAuMA)

([www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Healthy-Digital-Media-Use-Habits-for-Babies-Toddlers-](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Healthy-Digital-Media-Use-Habits-for-Babies-Toddlers-Preschoolers.aspx?_gl=1*1480npy*_ga*MTkxMjYwMjcxNS4xNzAyNDgwMTU4*_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ*MTcwMjQ4MDE1OC4xLjEuMTcwMjQ4MDE5MS4wLjAuMA)

[Preschoolers.aspx?\\_gl=1\\*1480npy\\*\\_ga\\*MTkxMjYwMjcxNS4xNzAyNDgwMTU4\\*\\_ga\\_FD9D3XZVQQ\\*MTcwMjQ4MDE1OC4xLjEuMTcwMjQ4MDE5MS4wLjAuMA](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Healthy-Digital-Media-Use-Habits-for-Babies-Toddlers-Preschoolers.aspx?_gl=1*1480npy*_ga*MTkxMjYwMjcxNS4xNzAyNDgwMTU4*_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ*MTcwMjQ4MDE1OC4xLjEuMTcwMjQ4MDE5MS4wLjAuMA))

[Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Child Development: An Updated Review and Strategies for Management](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10353947/) ([www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10353947/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10353947/))

[Screen Time and Children](http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx)

([www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx](http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-Watching-TV-054.aspx))

[What do we really know about kids and screens?](http://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/cover-kids-screens) ([www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/cover-kids-screens](http://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/cover-kids-screens))

[18 Average Screen Time Statistics \[2023\]: How Much Screen Time Is Too Much?](http://www.zippia.com/advice/average-screen-time-statistics/#:~:text=The%20average%20American%20spends%207,of%20screen%20time%20per%20day.)

([www.zippia.com/advice/average-screen-time-statistics/#:~:text=The%20average%20American%20spends%207,of%20screen%20time%20per%20day.](http://www.zippia.com/advice/average-screen-time-statistics/#:~:text=The%20average%20American%20spends%207,of%20screen%20time%20per%20day.))

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