Screen Time Guidelines for Preschoolers

Preschoolers learn by interacting with the world around them. They need to be physically active — to run, climb, and swing on the playground — and to have creative outlets like drawing or dress-up.

Time spent with screens (like a TV, tablet, or smartphone) can be an opportunity to reinforce learning and promote creative play. But too much screen time can have unhealthy side effects.

For this reason, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends limiting the amount of time that preschoolers spend in front of a screen. It's good advice — but in today's world, it can be tough to keep kids away from all the TVs, tablets, computers, smartphones, and gaming systems they'll see.

Here's how to keep time spent with screens as productive as possible.

How Much Is Too Much?

Preschoolers ages 2 to 5 should have no more than 1 hour of screen time each day. The exception to this rule is video chatting with grandparents or other family friends, which is considered quality time interacting with others.

Not all screen time is created equal. For example, you and your child playing an interactive phonics or numbers game on a tablet or watching high-quality educational programming together is **good screen time**. Keeping the TV on all day for "background noise" or letting your preschooler watch your favorite shows with you are examples of **bad screen time**.

Use screen time as a chance to interact with your child and teach lessons about the world. Don't let your child spend time alone just staring at a screen.

Screen Time Tips

The same parenting rules apply to screen time as to anything else — set a good example, establish limits, and talk with your child about it.

To make your preschooler's screen time more productive:

- **Be with young kids during screen time and interact with them.** That can mean playing an educational game with your child or talking about something you see together in an age-appropriate TV show or video.

- **Research games and apps before getting them for your child.** There are thousands of apps and games that claim to be educational, but not all of them are. Search online to see which ones educators and doctors consider the best.

- **Schedule plenty of non-screen time into your child's day.** Unstructured playtime is important for building creativity, so young children should have time to play away from screens every day. Family meals and bedtimes are also important times to put the screens away and interact with your child.

- **Keep devices with screens out of your child's bedroom after bedtime,** and don't allow a TV in your child's bedroom.

Reviewed by: KidsHealth Medical Experts