

# Screen time and young children

Screen time includes activities such as watching TV, using tablets/ipads, playing video games and interacting on mobile phones. It has been shown to have some developmental risks for children, including speech and language delays and the ability for a child to self-soothe.

It can be hard to limit screen time. It can be the one time of day as a parent that you get some peace and quiet, or it can be a welcome distraction if you are trying to get work done at home.



However, research shows young children learn best from face-to-face interactions with caring adults. It's best to keep their screen time to a minimum:

- **For children under 2 years old**, screen time is not recommended.
- **For children 2 to 5 years old**, limit routine or regular screen time to less than 1 hour per day.

## **The earlier you set limits or come up with a media plan the easier it will be in the future**

Setting limits when children are young is easier than cutting back when they're older. As a family, agree on basic screen time rules that everyone understands and shares. While it might be tricky to set a schedule with a toddler, you could consider developing a simple schedule to help guide when screen time can be used.

### **Tips to set a schedule:**

- You can set specific times of the day or week when your child knows they'll be allowed to use their screens. For instance, maybe the 30 minutes before dinner are always open for screen time. That kind of structure helps kids know what to expect and cuts down on their requests for screens at other times.
- Implement the change at a good time. Changing the rules at a time when other things are changing may make it easier for kids to accept. For example, try starting right after the weekend on Monday — not on a busy Wednesday.
- Discuss the change with kids a few days in advance. Nobody likes to have change unexpectedly tossed on them.

### **Ideas to help cut back on screen time:**

- Be a good role model with your own screen use—on *all* devices. Consider putting devices away or at a charging station so they're not attracting your attention or the attention of your child.

- Be realistic - If your kids are spending a lot of leisure time on screens, start by setting smaller, more attainable goals. Instead of jumping right to the recommended one to two hours or less per day, start by cutting their current screen time in half.
- Create phone-free zones/times in the home, such as during meals and in bedrooms.
- Turn off screens when no one is using them, especially background TV.
- Avoid using screens for *at least* 1 hour before bedtime and keep all screens out of your child's bedroom. They interfere with sleep.
- Choose healthy activities, like reading, outdoor play and crafts, over screen time. It is a good idea to brainstorm alternatives in advance, so you have a list of screen-free activities ready to refer to.
- Be engaged - After school or work, spend time each day talking face to face with kids and give them your full attention.



#### **How to stay on track:**

As with many changes, children may push-back against it. It is natural for children to test new boundaries. If you stick to your plan, after a few days the push-back will likely fade as kids settle into new routines. As best as you are able, stick to your routine and avoid making exceptions for the first few weeks. When kids know what to expect and understand limits, they will be less likely to push back or request additional screen time.

For more information:

<https://caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/behavior-and-development/screen-time-and-young-children>