

Media and Young Children

JANUARY 2018 TOPIC OF THE MONTH

Electronic media--TV, internet, apps on tablets or smartphones--it's everywhere. For many people, there are very few times during the day when they aren't connected by some form of electronic media. According to [Nielson's Total Audience Report](#), in 2015, the average adult used media 11 hours a day. A 2015 [PEW research study](#) found that 90% of adults, age 18-29, use a social media platform, and this same age group checked their smartphones 74 times a day. On average, adults have their phones accessible to them 22 out of 24 hours a day.

In 1970, children began regularly watching TV at 4 years of age, whereas today, children begin interacting with digital media *at 4 months of age*. Children are growing up surrounded by media and technology.

Research on how electronic media affects learning and development in young children 0-5 is being conducted, but is limited at this time. Early research has indicated the need for healthy limits and parental guidance in this area. The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) recently reviewed the existing literature on television, videos and mobile/interactive technology for their potential educational benefit and related health concerns for young children 0-5 and published specific guidance to families in managing their young children's media.

The policy statement entitled [Media and Young Minds](#) outlines time limits based on age and content. It emphasizes the importance of parent-child shared media use and the importance of spending time in other developmental activities that do not involve media.

AAP Media use Recommendations by Age

0-18 Months

- **Recommendation:**
Avoid use of screen media other than video-chatting with family along with parents.
- **Reasons for the Recommendation:**
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. Children at this age are still developing cognitive, language, sensorimotor, and social-emotional skills, which require hands-on exploration and social interaction with trusted caregivers to develop.

18-24 Months

- **Recommendation:**

If digital media is introduced, parents should choose high-quality programs. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them. Avoid solo media use.

- **Reason for Recommendation:**

Children younger than 2 are still unable to understand what they see on a screen and how it relates to their world. Research has shown that toddlers can begin to learn new words from “word learning” videos, but only if their parents watched with them and retaught the words, essentially using the videos as a guide to in-person teaching.

2-5 Years

- **Recommendation:**

Limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality programs. Parents should co-view or co-play media with their children. Choose media that is interactive, non-violent, educational, developmentally appropriate and prosocial. Find other activities besides media for children to do that are healthy for their bodies and minds too.

- **Reasons for Recommendation:**

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.

Children 3-5 years of age have more mature minds. Well-designed educational programs have been shown to improve cognitive, language, reading skills, and social outcomes for children 3 to 5 years of age when viewed in moderation.

Media Recommendations for all Ages

- Parents should not feel pressured to introduce media early in fear 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. This helps children understand what they are seeing and helps them apply what they learn to the world around them.
- Avoid fast-paced programs with lots of distracting content. Children don’t understand them as well. Avoid violent content.
- Turn off television and other devices when not in use and during mealtimes.
- Avoid using media as the only way to calm a child. This can lead to children being unable to develop their own emotion regulation.
- Keep bedrooms, mealtimes and parent-child playtimes screen free for *adults and children*. Suggest to parents they use the “Do not Disturb” feature on their phone during these times.
- No screens 1 hour before bedtime and no screens in the bedroom during bedtime and sleep.

Why Limit Media Use?

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

- **Sleep**

Children with screens in their bedroom (TV, computer, mobile devices) sleep less and fall asleep later at night. Screens can overstimulate babies, causing them to not fall asleep as quickly.

- **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 skills. This may be because they interact less with parents and family, where these skills are developed.

Parents who are distracted with media also have been shown to interact less with their children, affecting their development.

- **Obesity**

Heavy media use in children is linked to weight gain and a risk of childhood obesity. Children are not active when using media, and are exposed to food advertising. They may also snack more while watching TV, all contributing factors.

- **Behavior Problems**

Violent content on TV and screens can contribute to behavior problems in children. They may be scared and confused by what they see or they may try to mimic on-screen characters.

Tips for Talking with Parents about Media Use

- **Start early.** Discuss recommended guidelines for media use within the first year before habits are formed. It's much easier to set healthy limits from the beginning.
- **Discuss the developmental reasons** that media is not recommended or is limited at the various ages. This helps parents understand the reasons for the information.
- **Stress the importance of parent and child interaction**, while using media, and the importance of also including non-media driven interactions between parent and child.
- **Challenge parents to evaluate their own media use** and how it might be affecting the time spent interacting with their children.
- **If parents are interested, guide them towards setting some media use goals** for their family. AAP has developed an online [Family Media Plan](#) tool to help with developing an achievable media use plan. AAP also has printable posters available in English and Spanish that lists media use guidelines and promotes the online tool that can be used in the WIC clinic. This is part of their [Media and Children Communication Toolkit](#).