Screen Time and Your Preschool-Aged Child

A resource for parents

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Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to educate parents about the harmful effects of screen time on preschool-aged children's social-emotional development, language development, and executive functioning. The goal is to change child rearing practices to better the quality of life for children and families. In my experience, parents are often unaware of the effects of screen time and unsure of where to turn for help.

"My child learns from the tablet." "He knows all of his colors, numbers, letters, and shapes." "He won't eat unless I let him watch videos on my phone." "It's the only thing that calms her down when she has a tantrum." "I let her play games and watch videos when I need to get work done around the house."

These are statements parents make when I explain appropriate screen time for young children. Thanks to many researchers and educators who study media use, screen time, and child development, we have learned a great deal about the drawbacks of overexposing children to screen time.

Young children are increasingly exposed to media and screen time as technology becomes more crucial to everyday living. Screen time is used by children and adults alike for many purposes—watching videos, playing games, learning, working, and entertaining. But how does screen time influence a young child's still developing brain and mental health? Parents are the decision-makers for their children and screen time is no different. Parents can be better equipped to navigate the technology-driven world when they are educated about appropriate screen time and healthy media use and are provided with reliable resources.

This handbook is a resource for parents to learn about how screen time can affect their child's developing language, social-emotional skills, and executive functioning. Promoting healthy child development isn't simply about *decreasing* screen time—it's also about *increasing* positive interactions with others. Parents will be able to access resources, tips, and recommendations on what they can do at home and in the community. Information within this handbook is based on current research and data. For more detailed information, please refer to my doctoral project, "The Effects of Screen Time on Preschool Aged Children's Development."

-Christine Ly

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What is Screen Time?

/skrēn/ /tīm/
noun

Time spent engaging in activities using a screened device.

Examples of screened media devices are:
- Television
- Tablet
- Smartphone
- Laptop
- Computer
- Digital video recorders
- DVD players
- Game consoles
- e-readers

Examples of screen time activities are:
- Watching videos
- Playing games
- Video chatting
- Reading
- Internet browsing

Ten key findings in 2017

1. There is a drastic increase in the number of screened media devices
2. 77% of time spent is on TV or mobile device
3. Many children watch TV before bedtime—against doctor's recommendations
4. Children from lower income and less educated families consume more media
5. Hispanic/Latino parents showed the most concern about children's media use
6. Low income and high income households are just as likely to have a mobile device
7. Many children younger than 2 years are not read to consistently
8. Parents are concerned with violent content, sexual content, time children spend with media, and advertising
9. 1 in 5 parents knew AAP screen time recommendations
10. Virtual reality, voice-activated devices, and wireless enabled toys are appearing in homes

-The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Kids Age Zero to Eight, 2017

Screen Time Recommendations

In October 2016, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released its latest recommendations for screen time and media use. The following chart has been adapted from AAP (www.aap.org):

Age	Recommended Screen Time	Notes
Younger than 18 months	Avoid	Video-chatting is allowable
18 – 24 months	Can begin introducing media	Parents should co-view High-quality programming only
2 – 5 years	1 hour per day	Parents should co-view High-quality programming only
6+ years	Parents set consistent amount of time	Set consistent availability to type of media Balance screen time with sleep and exercise

Parents should:

- ✓ Emphasize creative, interactive, and non-media oriented play over screen time (peek-a-boo, pretend play restaurant, playground time)
- ✓ Only allow high-quality programming (e.g., Sesame Workshop or Public Broadcasting Service)
- ✓ Watch along with your child
- ✓ Avoid screen time before bedtime for your child
- ✓ Turn off background television
- ✓ Utilize parental controls on smartphones, tablets, and apps/games/websites

Social-Emotional Development in Young Children

What is social-emotional development?

Social-emotional development includes social interactions, emotional awareness, and self-regulation.

- *Social interaction* involves relationships that we have with others. Children's first social interactions are with parents and family members. As they get older, these social interactions extend to peers, teachers, and others in the community. Examples include sharing toys and making friends at school.
- *Emotional awareness* is when we are able to recognize what we are feeling inside and also includes the ability to recognize emotions in other people. For children, this may include comforting someone who is crying or exploring why we feel a specific emotion.
- *Self-regulation* is the ability to process and control our actions, emotions, and thoughts in a healthy manner. Often, we need to fight our first instincts in responding to a tough situation and think the situation through. For young children, this may include calming down when upset or not giving up on a hard task.

> Healthy social-emotional development is needed for self-esteem, academic success, and positive relationships with others.

Why is social-emotional development important?

For children, healthy social interactions with peers and teachers are required for friendships and learning. When children have positive social relationships with others, they are learning skills that they will use when they become working adults with families of their own. Through increasing social interactions, children develop and learn more complex emotions (e.g., jealousy, embarrassment, guilt, pride) in themselves and in others. Regulating these emotions allows the child to face their fears, try new things, be persistent, and act in a calm manner.

Children who have positive social-emotional development are able to share, collaborate, and help others. They have a greater likelihood of staying in school and are more likely to graduate from high school on time, attain a college degree, and have a stable job. Research also found that children with prosocial skills are less likely to need public aid as adults and less likely to be arrested.

Strong social-emotional development is beneficial to children who are at-risk. These populations include low-income, developmentally delayed/disabled, and other minorities (e.g., based on sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender, immigrant status). You can cultivate a supportive environment and help your child develop a sense of self, leading to confidence and higher self-esteem. It is important to build a foundation when your child is young in order for them to continue to build on it when they enter school.

How do children learn social-emotional development?

Social-emotional development is a constant process that begins at birth and continues through adulthood. The basic building blocks of social-emotional development begin forming the instant you interact with your baby. When you respond to your distressed infant in a sensitive and loving manner, they feel supported and will be more likely to explore the environment and interact as they get older.

Children begin to establish healthy relationships with family members and then peers and teachers. They learn the appropriate and inappropriate ways to interact with others simply by watching. As children socialize, they process emotions, language, and interactions. You can help foster social-emotional development by talking about a situation and the emotions, reactions, and behaviors involved.

> Screen time can increase aggressive behavior, decrease ability to recognize emotions, and keep your child from developing self-regulation skills.

Screen Time & Social-Emotional Development

When children have poor social-emotional development, they often have challenging behaviors that influence relationships with others. Children with these tendencies may experience rejection from peers, punishment from school staff, and problems with family members. Beyond social interactions, children with behaviors also experience difficulties with learning and academics, resulting in poor grades.

When your child is using screen time—when *you* are using screen time—this takes away from time that can be spent playing, laughing, reading, or simply being together. More time spent in front of a screen can be harmful to the development of social skills, self-regulation, and emotional awareness.

Children learn how to interact with others best through watching people in their environment, not on a screen. They watch how family members talk, eat dinner, and even argue with each other. Each moment can be a teaching moment with your child. You can work on sharing while playing a game, serving dinner, or having a snack together. Watching how cartoon animals share toys is not an effective way of learning to share. You can also teach your child about positive and negative emotions by talking about what others are doing. Children will learn and recognize emotions more easily on their family members than they will on their favorite cartoon character. Screen time can be used to help develop social skills but you must watch with your child in order to help them understand. Engaging in screen time with your child is very important.

Digital Pacifier

Using screen time to calm your crying child teaches them the habit of depending on an outside force to calm down. Give your child a chance to calm themselves or work with them.

Digital Babysitter

Avoid screen time to entertain a child while you get work done. Give your child a chance to be bored and come up with a fun game

You might use screen time as a **digital pacifier** to calm your crying child. You hand them their favorite video on your phone and they stop crying. This is harmful to your child's social-emotional development as they do not develop *self-regulation* skills. They are relying on an outside force to help them calm down instead of soothing themselves down by processing their feelings. Habits form and as they get older, they will not be able to successfully work through negative feelings (sad, mad, frustrated) by themselves.

When children view violent content, typically videos or television shows that are meant for adults, they can act out these violent scenes. They have more violent and physically aggressive play towards others, which will create many problems in the classroom and playground when they begin school. These aggressive behaviors that are learned early on can be difficult to unlearn when children get older.

Language Development in Young Children

What is language?

Verbal language is the words we use and how we use them. We use verbal language to share our ideas, tell other what we need, and to socialize. Verbal language includes knowing what words mean, how to put words together in sentences, how to make new words using known words. Language also includes a social aspect where we know what to say in different situations in addition to utilizing nonverbal language. Young children can use their language to ask for milk, tell others what they are feeling, greet others, and ask questions. They can also use nonverbal language to express themselves by frowning, pointing, signing, or gesturing.

Why is language important?

Language allows us to communicate with others. Language makes it easy for us to make friends, build relationships, and exchange ideas. When your child learns language, they will be able to tell an adult when they are hungry, hurt, or unhappy.

As your child grows and develops a larger vocabulary, they learn how to ask for what they need, talk about what they see, and share what they are thinking. Language connects us to one another and helps build social-emotional development also. They also learn nonverbal communication—ways of communicating without using words such as body language. Body language includes using and understanding eye contact, facial expressions, body posturing, tone of voice, and gestures. Your child will understand body language better when they see you using it rather than viewing it on television.

Language can be both verbal and nonverbal. *Nonverbal communication* is communicating without words. This includes:
- Eye contact
- Facial expressions
- Body posture
- Tone of voice
- Gestures

Parents may worry about teaching their child two languages. Children who come from bilingual (two-language) families have flexible brains and have been shown to understand math problems better, use logic easily, and have strong problem solving skills. They also focus, remember, and make decisions with more ease compared to monolingual children. Bilingual skills can help increase development in other areas such as executive functioning, social-emotional development, and academics. Parents often fear that teaching the child two languages will confuse them. Don't worry, it doesn't!

How do children learn language?

Infants begin to learn language from the time they are born. It starts when you coo or make sounds to your baby. Your baby will turn their head and slowly begin to babble and copy the sounds they hear. Children learn language through imitating so it is very important to talk, read, and sing to your child. It starts with learning simple sounds like *ma* and *da*. Then, your child will start to pick up words that they hear often—*milk*, *mommy*, and *daddy*. Once they are ready, they will start using sentences. *I want milk*. The best way that your child will learn these language skills is through you! You can talk or sing while you play together and practice using sounds, words, and sentences. Work at your child's level.

As children get older and approach school age, their sentences get more complex and they ask more questions. Answering, explaining, and exploring these answers will help enrich your child's vocabulary, language, intelligence, and social skills. Again, face-to-face interactions are the best way for your child to learn language.

Screen Time & Language

In the first few years of life, your baby's brain is constantly making new connections and cutting off connections that are not being used. Children who view more screen time have more risk of developing language delays, particularly in their ability to use words to communicate. Reading, talking, and singing to your child helps them learn. These activities also foster a secure attachment between you and your baby because you are playing with them! Language helps their brains grow and prepare them for school.

Excessive screen time can lead to language delays. These delays can affect your child's vocabulary, understanding of language, and ability to form sentences. Their social interactions suffer as they lack the words to interact with others, making it difficult to form friendships. Early childhood language delays are also linked to academic difficulties during the school years. Language is used in almost every school subject and becomes more complex as children age. Beyond schooling, developed language skills, both verbal and nonverbal, are required when teens enter the workforce.

You may think: *My child is hearing language when they watch television and videos. Isn't that good?* Just like how children learn to be social, they also learn language best when they are speaking to a live person who can respond to them. Language is social in

> Screen time takes away time that you can spend playing with your child. Background television decreases the quality of time spent with your child and decreases language spoken by you and your child.

nature. Screens don't respond to your child when they talk and screens don't ask questions and give feedback. Even background television is harmful to your child.

When television is left on in the background at home, you may think that your child is not listening or paying attention to the television. The background television decreases the quality of time spent between you and your child. You may be distracted by a scene on the show or your child may be distracted by a television commercial for a toy. The quality of play is lessened. In addition, when the television is on, there is a decrease in the amount of words and sentences spoken by both parents and children. There is less opportunity for parents to elicit language from their child.

Simple ways to teach language

1. Point out things you see while walking
2. Explain what you're doing as you do it (cooking, grocery shopping)
3. Talk, read, and sing to your child

Learning new words is part of increasing language skills.
There are many television shows and videos that claim to help a child learn language. They show a picture, say the word, explain it, and move on. Can children learn words simply by viewing them on a two-dimensional screen? Research finds that children learn new words better when parents teach it to them compared to learning words from a video. You know when your child has learned a word and you can move on. You can also test your child by applying the word in different situations. A screen doesn't allow a similar level of interactivity, especially when your child is watching videos by themselves.

Executive Functioning Development in Young Children

What is executive functioning?
Executive functioning (EF) is a set of skills that we use to reach our goals and involves 3 key functions: working memory, mental flexibility, and self-control. We must remember our goal, focus on the steps to get there, keep away from distractions, and multi-task.

Working memory is the ability to remember information, make changes to that information, and come up with new information. Children use working memory when you give them directions. "Put away your shoes by the front door." Your child has to remember what (put away shoes) and where (by the door). Young children also use working memory to:
- Learn to read
- Learn math
- Remember and follow rules of a game

Mental flexibility helps us adjust to new situations when something unexpected happens. Children must be mentally flexible when:
- Their routines change (e.g., they get sick, go on vacation)
- People react differently than expected
- Old ways of solving problems don't work anymore

Self-control allows us to ignore distractions and think before acting. For children, this is an important skill as they learn to navigate the world. They must learn to control their emotions and actions and you play an important role. For young children, self-control is needed when:
- Someone takes their toy
- Parents say "no" to a request
- They are forced to do something they do not want to do (e.g., go to bed, eat dinner)

> Executive functioning is a set of skills that we use to reach our goals by thinking about our goals, ignoring distractions, meeting demands, solving problems, and controlling our emotions

Why is executive functioning important?
EF is an important skill that can help children and adults live and work effectively every day. Children and adults must be able to ignore distractions, meet demands, solve problems, and work with others to be contributing members of society.

These skills are very important, even for young children. Think about when children engage in a group game together. Each child must be able to take turns. That means the child must stop doing what they are doing and allow another child to take a turn (self-control). When it is their turn again, the child must remember what they are supposed to be doing (working memory). If the child before them did something unpredictable, they must be able to react and adjust (mental flexibility).

Similarly, imagine the child who is in a classroom and trying to learn. If the child is unable to control their actions, they may choose to play with toys instead of engaging in learning about letters and numbers. Or, if a child does have the attention span to remember information and change it to produce new information, it may look like the child is not paying attention. Try this without using any pencil and paper. Take the number 5. Now add 7, subtract 3, divide by 3, and multiply to 2. This is working memory and math. EF skills, or lack of skills, can impact a child's learning and carry on into adulthood.

Adults who have poor EF skills may have a hard time remembering to run errands like picking up the dry cleaning or going grocery shopping. They may not be able to hold a steady job if they don't remember to go to work on time or get distracted easily. They may have a hard time working with other people because they cannot control their actions or emotions.

As you can see, EF is needed for children and adults to function during social interactions, in school, and in the community. Even into adulthood, well developed EF skills allow us to have successful relationships with others, raise children, get along with others, and be a contributing member of society.

> **Inappropriate programming for your child can decrease their ability to process information, remember details, and solve problems**

How do children learn executive functioning?

The frontal lobe of the brain works with the rest of the brain to develop EF. EF can be learned from a young age. You and your child can practice and train EF, like muscles! You can help your child develop EF skills by giving them consistent routines, showing them how to act in different situations, and being good role models and treating others how you would like to be treated. Children can learn these skills and apply them to all interactions in their daily lives. They can play with others and begin to establish friendships, learn how to deal with a hard situation when they have a fight with friends and you can explain and show them how to resolve their problems. You set the stage by explaining right from wrong and teaching them how to apologize if needed. Over time, children will be able to do these things without your help.

Screen Time & Executive Functioning

Babies aren't born with EF skills. Things like stress, neglect, abuse, and violence and keep infants from developing EF skills to their full potential. Increased screen time is not helpful to children who may already be at risk for these reasons. EF helps us guide our actions in order to achieve goals, whether they are to build a tower of blocks, draw a picture, finish homework, or get a job. Your child's ability to think about their actions and stop themselves from acting impulsively begins to develop around four years of age and will continue to develop. When your child has EF difficulties at a young age, these difficulties will extend into their school years and affect their ability to pay attention in class, remember their assignments, and control their behaviors.

The type of programming and amount of screen time that your child views can affect the development of EF. Many homes have background television left on while parents do housework. Background television isn't always monitored by parents for how appropriate they are for a child. Cartoons are made for young children and adults of all ages. A study found that even when children watch 9 minutes of a television show that is too fast-paced for them, they showed immediate deficits in their EF abilities. They have more difficulties with their working memory, ability to process two things at once, ability to solve a problem with multiple steps, and difficulties with delayed gratification (or the ability to resist a small treat now for a bigger treat later).

Smartphones and tablets give us the ability to use our fingers, touch a screen, and instantly access a world of games, apps, videos, and entertainment. This instant feedback can be quite handy; however, it can be harmful to your children who are developing their EF skills. Young children grow impatient when they get bored of a game or when an app is not loading. This impatience will likely grow into their daily environment. Simple tasks such as waiting in line at the supermarket, taking turns on the slide at the playground, and waiting until after dinner for dessert are all hard to do.

Self-control is also more difficult. Children have a difficult time separating reality from fantasy. When they view violence during screen time, they may act out what they see. *Didn't get what I wanted when I asked? Take it*.

Never Judge an App by its Cover: How to Evaluate an App

Thousands of apps and games are available on tablets, smartphones, and computers. They advertise themselves to be *educational* but have little to no evidence to support their claim. They also teach rote skills that target memorization instead of meaningful learning. Meaningful learning involves understanding facts and relating them to already known facts.

As children begin to reach kindergarten age, they should be developing more advanced thinking such as cause-and-effect, number concepts (more, less), time concepts, matching similar pictures (animals, food items, people), and sequence.

Is an app worthwhile and educational? To determine if an app is worthwhile and educational, parents are encouraged to look at an app and ask themselves:

1. **Is this app at the appropriate level for my child?**
   The app should be appropriate for my child's chronological age and/or developmental age. This is particularly important for children who may have delays in development.

2. **Does this app actively engage my child mentally?**
   The app should require my child to think about the task, ask questions, and predict what might happen next. It should be both *hands-on* and *minds-on*.

3. **Does the app have distracting features that keep my child from learning**?
   The app should not have unnecessary graphics or visuals that may distract my child from learning the lesson.

4. **Can my child apply what they learned from the app to their everyday life?**
   If my child cannot apply what they learned to things they see in their environment, then they have not truly learned from the app.

5. **Does the app require or encourage co-viewing or social interactions?**
   Research has shown that children learn best when there is a face-to-face interaction. My child can learn best if the app allows for a parent-child interaction so I can apply what they learned to our everyday life. This helps them retain information better.

6. **Does the app list what my child should learn and keep track of their progress?**
   The app should not target the same game/activity over and over (matching shapes, identifying colors). Once my child has mastered a skill, they should move onto the next level.

Family Media Use Plan

The American Academy of Pediatrics developed the Family Media Use Plan to help parents track and account for health, education, and media use for individuals and families. The Family Media Use Plan is accessible at www.HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan.

The Family Media Use Plan allows parents to include multiple children and select their age range. By selecting an age range, the Family Media Use Plan lists recommended tips and activities. From there, parents customize each child's media use plan in the following areas:

- Screen Free Zones
- Screen Free Times
- Device Curfews
- Choosing And Diversifying Media
- Balancing Online And Offline Time
- Manners Matter
- Digital Citizenship
- Safety First
- Sleep And Exercise

You should print the Family Media Use Plan and place it where everyone can see. Check the plan and revise it as needed. You can also record daily screen time use and work together as a family to decrease screen time and schedule activities throughout the week. Charts to track daily screen time use and schedule family events are available on the following pages.

Screen Time for _____

Week of _____

	Television	Phone/Tablet	Video Games	Computer	Daily Total
Sunday					
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					

Family Play/Activities Schedule

Time:	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

[SAMPLE] Family Play/Activities Schedule

Time:	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
7:00 am							**No Screen Day!**
8:00 am							
9-11 am	Library						Park
12:00 pm							Community center
1:00 pm	Homework						Swimming
2:00 pm							
3:00 pm							Playdate with Eddie
4:00 pm		Soccer practice		Soccer practice			
5:00 pm	Cook with mom	Academics	Academics	Academics	Academics		
6:00 pm		Superhero night			Disney night	Ice cream night	
7:00 pm						Game night	
8:00 pm							
9:00 pm	Bed time	Bed time	Bed time	Bed time	Bed time	Bed time	Bed time

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Tips to Reduce Screen Time

Parents implement:
- Be a good digital role model for your child. Be aware of how much screen time you are using
- Develop a Family Media Use Plan
- Set consistent rules about how much screen time is allowed, when screen time is/is not allowed, and where screen time is/is not allowed. Be sure to state the consequences and to enforce them consistently
- Preview videos, shows, apps, and games before providing them for your child
- Watch media and use screen time along with your child
- If you child is watching a program by themselves, check on what your child is watching periodically, especially when using a smartphone or tablet
- Utilize the "Do not disturb" option on smartphones to limit screen time
- Keep televisions and screened devices out of bedrooms
- Charge media devices in rooms away from areas of work or sleep
- Use programs or apps to time and shut off access to devices after a specified time
- Avoid using screen time as a reward or taking away screen time as a punishment. Doing so makes screen time seem more important than it is
- Turn off the television or videos when no one is watching
- Explain family values regarding screen time. This is especially important when your child goes to a friend's house and watches hours of television—different families have different priorities
- Provide the child with activities outside of the home such as play dates, bike riding, swimming, community events, sports teams, dance teams, or going to the library
- Encourage indoor activities such as reading, drawing, and creative playing

Work together as a family:
- Pair screen time with physical activities such as stretching or simple exercises during commercial breaks
- Set aside family night to play games
- Be good digital role models and follow the same rules you set for your child. If children are not allowed to have screen time at the dinner table, neither should parents
- Track how much screen time each person engages in each day and work together to reduce the hours
- Be involved in their lives simply by asking questions, observing your child play, and listening to your child
- Keep the television off and phones away from the dinner table
- Work as a family and implement a weekly screen-free day where screened devices are not allowed and engage in alternative activities
- Include your child in the conversation and ask them what they'd like to do instead of screen time
- Develop a consistent schedule for free play, school/academic work, and activities

Tips to Co-View with Your Child

Co-viewing refers to watching screen time along with your child. Co-viewing allows you to be involved in screen time by monitoring what your child watches, how long your child watches for, and how they can apply what they learn to their surroundings. The benefits of co-viewing with your child are great. Your child can:

- Remember more vocabulary words and can apply them
- Develop better literacy skills
- Maintain focus and attention on the video
- Have increased cognitive engagement
- Develop better listening comprehension
- Avoid inappropriate media (e.g., violence, aggression, sexual content)

In addition, co-viewing allows more bonding time between you and your child while engaging in an activity that your child enjoys. One technique used in reading is called *dialogic reading* and these tactics can be applied to screen time. Here are some tips to co-view with your child that include *dialogic* tactics:

Dialogic tactics
- Ask your child to say something about the program/video
- Think about your child's response
- Expand on your child's response by repeating it in other words and adding new information they may have left out
- Repeat the information

Other tips
- Point out important parts of the program such as new words or interesting details ("Wow! Did you see that bird? It's called a toucan and it has a big beak.")
- Use words to describe what is happening (The boy smiled because he got a new toy)
- Ask questions about cause and effect ("Why do you think that boy was sad?")
- Pause the program and ask questions about what happened before
- Ask simple wh- questions (who, what, when, where, why)
- Apply what is viewed to your child's own experience ("He liked the pizza! Do you like pizza? What do you like on your pizza?" "She seems sad. When do you feel sad?")
- Encourage your child to think about how someone else might feel. This helps them learn that others may feel differently than they do

Tips for Children who have Social-Emotional Difficulties

The following tips are for children who have difficulties with social interactions, emotional awareness, and self-regulation. They are divided into three age groups: infant, toddler, and preschool. Tips from one age group may apply to the other two—you pick and choose what works best for your child. You should also be aware of social-emotional development milestones and consult your doctor if you are concerned.

Infant (Birth to 1 year)
- Avoid screen time as recommended
- Give your child your full attention when they are playing with you. Limiting your own distractions prevents you and your child from feeling frustrated and can reduce your child's behaviors
- Use loving words and warm touches when cuddling or kissing your baby. These go a long way to help them love themselves and love others
- Give your baby access to a cozy, soft, and warm physical environment
- Encourage your baby to try new things. New toys with a different texture, new foods with a different taste, or new people
- Respond immediately when your baby is in distress to foster the feeling that his needs and wants will be met when needed
- Observe your baby and see what interests him. Bring the object to him and look it over, talk about it, and play with it together
- Be consistent with your responses to your baby. When he is frustrated or distressed, react as consistently as you can each time

Toddler (1 year to 3 years)
- Follow screen time recommendations and introduce high-quality programming as you wish
- Give your child your full attention when they are playing with you. Limiting your own distractions prevents you and your child from feeling frustrated
- Provide sensory play. You can use bins and fill them with water, beans, or sand and put small toys inside
- Develop a consistent, everyday routine. When your child knows what to expect each day, they feel secure
- Talk about emotions. You can say things like, "You look happy! You're smiling. I think this toy makes you happy."
- Arrange play dates with children who are about the same age. You can help them learn to play together, share, and experience friendship
- Reinforce your child for positive behaviors! You can do this with praise, high fives, stickers, or a simple hug
- Give your child the opportunity to do things for themselves, even if it's messy. Let him work on feeding himself, dressing himself, or clean up. This will help him develop independence, confidence, and self-esteem

Preschool (3 years to 5 years)
- Follow screen time recommendation of 1 hour per day
- Avoid programming and games with violent content. Violence viewed in media has been shown to increase violent behaviors in children
- Give your child your full attention when they are playing with you. Limiting your own distractions prevents you and your child from feeling frustrated and can reduce your child's behaviors
- Only use screen time to distract during times such as doctor's visits/exams or plane rides. Using screen time consistently to calm a child prevents the child from learning how to calm themselves
- Take children to the local library for group activities and readings
- If your family is multi-cultural, help your child learn about family traditions and culture. Multi-cultural children who have strong familial and cultural values develop strong self-identity
- Rearrange furniture in the family room to promote interactive play and avoid making the television the main focus. This might look like moving sofas to help children build forts or creating an activities table
- Use art to teach. Have your child draw and talk about what they are drawing
- Make handy and portable activity bins with simple games and activities such as matching cards, puzzles, and blocks to use in the community or when you need to keep your child occupied for a time. These are a great alternative to handing them a smartphone or tablet
- Use videos to explore emotions. You can watch a video about two children fighting over a toy and discuss what they are doing, why, and how to resolve it
- Encourage pretend play with toys/objects around the house
- Talk about the difference between feeling an emotion and acting on an emotion. It is okay to feel angry when someone takes your toy, but it is not okay to express anger by hitting them
- At the end of the day, talk about how they felt today. Talk about something good that happened and how it made you feel and talk about something bad that happened and how it made you feel. Encourage your child to do the same and discuss
- Practice calming techniques with your child when they are calm, not when they are angry. This way, they already know the technique when they are angry and you simply need to remind them to use it. Calming techniques include deep breathing, counting to ten, taking a walk, hugging their legs and squeezing hard, or hugging a pillow. Once your child is calm, discuss the situation and emotions

Tips for Children who have a Language Delay

The following tips are for children who have difficulties with using and understanding language. They are divided into three age groups: infant, toddler, and preschool. Tips from one age group may apply to the other two—you pick and choose what works best for your child. You should also be aware of language milestones and consult your doctor if you are concerned.

Infant (Birth to 1 year)
- Avoid screen time as recommended
- Use eye contact when speaking to your child. Make sure they're looking at you
- Promote development of joint attention. Joint attention is focusing on an object together. Infants and babies can convey their needs simply by looking at you and looking at a bottle of milk to say they are hungry. (Point to object, use your eye gaze, and follow your baby's lead when they find something interesting)
- Use different patterns and tones when speaking. (Raise your pitch when asking a question or change your voice to imitate different characters)
- Imitate your child's laughter and facial expressions and be animated
- Talk to your child during everyday activities. (You can talk about what you're making for dinner, where you are taking them, and what you will do today)
- Sing songs with your child
- Practice simple actions like clapping hands, peek-a-boo, and reaching for objects

Toddler (1 year to 3 years)
- Follow screen time recommendations and introduce high-quality programming as you wish
- Point out and name objects in the environment
- Repeat what your child is saying to make sure you understand
- Use gestures along with your words such as waving when saying hello
- When your child attempts to talk, acknowledge it
- Don't force your child to speak. When they do speak, praise them
- Pair sounds with words and meaning such as, "A cow says moo."
- Expand on single words that your child already knows. (For example, if your child knows the word "train," you could say, "That is a train. A train rolls on a train track. A train goes *choo choo*.")
- Label items in your environment and explain what you do with the item
- If your family is multi-lingual, designate one particular adult with one particular language and be consistent. (Research found that bilingual individuals are able to understand math concepts, develop problem solving skills, use logic, maintain family and culture relationships, and do well academically)
- Read a book to your child every day. While reading, point to pictures and describe it. You can also ask questions about what the child sees

Preschool (3 years to 5 years)
- Follow screen time recommendation of 1 hour per day
- Take children to the local library for group activities and readings
- Make a picture book and work with your child on sorting them by categories, labeling them, and matching similar pictures
- Ask questions to expand your child's understanding of concepts (Can a dog fly? Did you sleep? Are you a girl?)
- Ask questions that require more than yes/no answer (Do you want to go to the park or the store? Do you want waffles or pancakes?)
- When using an app or watching television together, pause what you are doing to ask questions and encourage your child to ask questions. (This will help the child comprehend and generalize information)
- Play *I Spy*. (You can say, "I spy something yellow!" and work together to point out items that are yellow. To make it more complex, you can say, "I spy something big *and* yellow")
- Pair using a child-word your child is using with the adult word. (When your child says "mum mum," you can say, "Mum mum? Do you want milk? Here is your milk.")
- Continue to introduce new vocabulary words and point them out in your home and in the community to help your child learn the word
- Play word games where you give the definition of a word and ask your child what that word could be. ("We use it to eat rice and we can find it in the kitchen")

Tips for Children who have Executive Functioning Difficulties

The following tips are for children who have difficulties with memory, self-control, and flexibility. They are divided into three age groups: infant, toddler, and preschool. Tips from one age group may apply to the other two—you pick and choose what works best for your child. You should also be aware of executive functioning milestones and consult your doctor if you are concerned.

Infants (Birth to 1 year)
- Avoid screen time as recommended
- Play peek-a-boo and mix it up! This will help with your baby's memory and patience. Hide a toy under a cloth and encourage your baby to look for it. This will help with their memory
- Play imitation games by imitating your baby and having them imitate simple sounds (da, ma, ba), animal sounds, or motor movements (clapping, waving, patting their head)
- Sing songs and encourage your baby to imitate the finger plays such as *Itsy Bitsy Spider*, *Slippery Fish*, or *Five Little Monkeys*
- Avoid fast-paced cartoons and television shows and apps with distracting visuals
- Give your baby a chance to calm themselves. They may cry for a bit, but learning to self-calm is an important skill.
- Start introducing play dates when your baby is ready. This can be with a friend and their baby or in mommy-and-me classes

Toddlers (1 year to 3 years)
- Follow screen time recommendations—high-quality programming only
- Take your child to the local library for group activities and readings
- Sing songs that use the whole body (*Hokey Pokey* or *Head Shoulder Knees & Toes)*
- Play simple games that need turn taking such as rolling a ball back and forth
- Play games that require the child to stop what they are doing so they can practice doing it without reminders. You can dance to the *Freeze* song where everyone freezes when the music stops. You can play *Red Light/Green Light* where you hold up a green light and everyone runs until you hold up a red light
- Play matching and sorting games—by size, category, color, shape
- Plan family activities outdoors. You can keep it simple and plan a camp day in the backyard or pack the family up for a hike and picnic elsewhere. Avoid using media devices and encourage talking, playing, and interacting. Greenery outdoors can help reduce symptoms of hyperactivity.
- When your child fights over a toy with another child, use it as an opportunity to explain and play together with the toy. Facilitate turn taking and praise your child when he follows through
- Use consistent and easy words to target positive behavior—indoor voice, gentle hands, calm body

Preschool (3 years to 5 years)
- Follow screen time recommendation of 1 hour per day
- Avoid fast-paced cartoons and television shows and apps with distracting visuals
- Have a variety of props ready for children to engage in imaginary play. You can even work together to create ones at home out of cereal boxes, egg cartons, or packaging boxes
- Give your child the opportunity to choose what they want to play. Keep toys in bins and allow them to select and engage with the toy. More toys have been shown to reduce the quality of play.
- Take your child to the local library for group activities and readings
- Cook meals together. Children can learn patience from waiting for cupcakes to bake, planning by measuring out ingredients, and self-control from not eating the cookie batter!
- Have your child help with simple chores around the house and praise them for doing so. You can make it fun by creating a to-do list and crossing off items as you each complete a chore
- Give your child a warning before moving onto a different activity. You can do this verbally ("In 5 minutes/turns, we are going to clean up and eat dinner"), using a timer, or using a visual schedule
- Play games that take time and have a clear goal in mind. This can be a board game, scavenger hunt, puzzle, or anything else you can think of. This will help them develop patience, resist temptation, be persistent, and focus
- Use a visual schedule and keep it simple. Providing something for your child to look at will serve as a reminder that they need to finish it and also allow them to feel successful when they complete the task
- Plan family activities outdoors. You can keep it simple and plan a camp day in the backyard or pack the family up for a hike and picnic elsewhere. Avoid using media devices and encourage talking, playing, and interacting. Greenery outdoors can help reduce symptoms of hyperactivity

Frequently Asked Questions

My child has learned about many things like colors, shapes, numbers, and letters. Isn't that good?

Pre-academic skills such as naming and pointing to shapes, numbers, letters, and colors are good to develop. This information is based on memorization. Meaningful learning takes place when your child can learn and understand a new idea and apply it to a different situation. Once your child masters these pre-academic skills, their brains need to be further stimulated. Also, when your child watches videos and plays games by pointing to colors, they are not interacting with anyone else to connect these concepts to their own environment. Participate in watching with your child and help them apply what they learn!

Why is it important to limit screen time now? My child will stop screen time when they start school.

The critical period for child development and the perfect time to build the foundation for future learning and development is in the first 5 years. Parents should begin laying the groundwork from infancy. Habits begin to form at a very young age. The more screen time your child uses, the harder it will be to break that habit once they get older. We use technology every day as children and as adults. By limiting screen time and teaching appropriate screen time habits now, you can help set the stage for future success.

How do my screen time habits affect my child's screen time habits?

Children are observant. They only see the world from their own perspective and cannot fully understand that someone else has a different view. Rules are rules. They do not understand that you might be using your phone for work or to do an errand. When your child sees your screen time habits, they learn what is okay and what is not. If they see you using your phone at the dinner table, they think they are allowed to use it also. You must be careful about when and how often you use screen time and set a good example for your child. Be consistent and fair.

My parents (child's grandparents) let him have the tablet all the time. What can I do to stop?

The most important first step is to sit down with grandparents and explain *why* screen time can be harmful. Once they understand the reasons why you do not want your child using screen time, they will be more willing to help decrease screen time. You can go over tips (pages 19-26) they can use. If you are using the Family Media Use Plan or activity schedule, talk to grandparents about how important it is to stick to the schedule.

How can I prevent my child from viewing inappropriate content (e.g., violence, sexual content) while they are on screen time?

The most effective way to keep your child from viewing inappropriate content is to co-view or watch along with your child. I know, this isn't always possible. If not, make sure that you are using child-friendly apps/websites such as YouTube Kids, PBS Kids, and Sesame Street. You can set a timer using your phone/tablet's features and check in with your child often. Do not let your child change the television program themselves. If your child will be using screen time alone, preview what they are about to play or watch. Common Sense Media has great tips and guides such as *A Parent's Ultimate Guide to YouTube* (www.commonsensemedia.org).

Plan A Day Out (www.planadayout.com)
Find fun things to do in Orange County with your child. You can search by date(s), distance, and group size. You can also organize results based on your child's age, giving them the chance to play with same-aged children; cost; and type of activity.

Orange County Public Libraries (http://www.ocpl.org/calendar)
Orange County Public Libraries host various activities throughout the week, including Crafts for Kids, Donuts with Dads, Book Adventures!, Introduction to Music for Kids, Spanish Storytime, Toddler Storytime, Preschool Storytime, Baby Lapsit Storytime, and Family Storytime.

OCMA **Orange County Museum of Art** (www.ocma.net)
The Orange County Museum of Art exhibits modern and contemporary art. Admission is free for children under 12.

Fun Orange County Parks (www.funorangecountyparks.com)
Fun Orange County Parks is a free community resource with information about parks and playgrounds in OC. You can find information about fun, interesting, and unique play places around OC, including beaches, nature hikes, nature centers, gardens, water play, aquariums, museums, zoos, and rainy day play.

Irvine Spectrum Toddler Tuesdays
(https://www.shopirvinespectrumcenter.com/events/toddler-tuesday-series-2017/)
On the third Tuesday of every month, Irvine Spectrum hosts mornings of fun, creativity, and special offers from 10 am to 12 pm. They provide live entertainment, crafts, and activities for little ones such as face painting, balloon artist, and coloring.

Pretend City Children's Museum (www.pretendcity.org)
Pretend City hosts an autism-friendly environment on the last Monday of almost every month (not May or December) with support from specialists who work with children with autism.

Los Angeles
Los Angeles has many museums with free admission: The Broad (www.thebroad.org), The Getty (www.getty.edu/museum), Griffith Observatory (www.griffithobservatory.org), and Marciano Art Foundation (www.marcianoartfoundation.org). Many other museums offer free admission on certain days of the week or month.

For more information on free museums within Orange County and Los Angeles County, visit http://www.socalmuseums.org/free/.

Visit your local community center, shopping malls, or religious institutions for additional community events.

Resources for Parents

American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org)
"The mission of the American Academy of Pediatrics is to attain optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents and young adults."

Commercial Free Childhood (www.commercialfreechildhood.org)
"CCFC is at the forefront of national efforts to reduce children's screen time and insure children time and space for active and creative play, face time with caring adults, and a connection with nature."

Common Sense (www.commonsensemedia.org)
"Common Sense is the leading independent nonprofit organization dedicated to helping kids thrive in a world of media and technology. We empower parents, teachers, and policymakers by providing unbiased information, trusted advice, and innovative tools to help them harness the power of media and technology as a positive force in all kids' lives."

Healthy Children (www.healthychildren.org)
"HealthyChildren.org is the only parenting website backed by 66,000 pediatricians committed to the attainment of optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults."

Public Broadcasting Service (www.pbs.org and www.pbskids.org)
"PBS offers programming that expands the minds of children, documentaries that open up new worlds, non-commercialized news programs that keep citizens informed on world events and cultures and programs that expose America to the worlds of music, theater, dance and art."

Regional Center of Orange County (www.rcocdd.com)
RCOC is the private nonprofit organization contracted by the State of California to coordinate services and supports for people with developmental disabilities in Orange County, including early intervention for infants and toddlers. If you live in Orange County and think your child may have a developmental delay or disability, contact RCOC for more information and a free assessment.

Sesame Workshop (www.sesameworkshop.org)
"Sesame Workshop's mission is to help kids grow smarter, stronger, and kinder . . . Cracking the code of learning is a continuous process. And a collaborative one."

We Can! (www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/)
"We Can! is a national movement designed to give parents, caregivers, and entire communities a way to help children 8 to 13 years old stay at a healthy weight."