

# Handy Handouts®

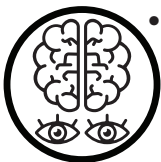
Free informational handouts for educators, parents, and students

## Screen Time and Development

by Adrienne DeWitt, M.A., CCC-SLP

There has been a lot of news recently regarding screen time and development. With new research, many doctors, speech-language pathologists, teachers, and parents have become concerned about how long and how often children use media (e.g. TV, YouTube, social media, etc.). Although there are studies showing that delays in executive functioning, language, and thinking are associated with screen time, scientists still are not sure if these delays are actually caused by screen time. But based on what information scientists know right now, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has made recommendations regarding how media should be consumed by children and how much. Here is a breakdown of those recommendations and strategies for you and your family.

**For children younger than 18 months,** avoid use of screen media other than video-chatting. Parents of children 18 to 24 months of age who want to introduce digital media should choose high-quality programming and watch it with their children to help them understand what they're seeing.<sup>1</sup>



- What is "high-quality programming"? The AAP specifically uses Sesame Workshop and PBS programming as examples in its article, but does not go on to define it much further. When choosing high-quality programming, search for shows and videos that teach age-appropriate concepts and vocabulary, such as letters, numbers, types of animals, etc.



- Make sure you are an active participant with your child. Comment on the show and ask questions, even if you have to pause the video or show. Treat it like a picture book. Simple comments ("Look! I see a bird!") and literal questions ("What are they doing?" "Where are they going?" and "Who's that?") are appropriate for conversations with children this age. Reference [Handy Handout #537](#) for more tips for asking questions and engaging with your child in conversation.



**For children ages 2 to 5 years,** limit screen use to 1 hour per day of 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.<sup>1</sup>



- Similar to the previous recommendation, make sure you are an active participant with your child, even if you have to pause the video. Make your comments more elaborate, such as, "Look at the peacock's large, purple and blue feathers!" [Handy Handout #546](#) has tips on how to make elaborate comments.



- Ask inferential questions (e.g. "Why do you think the rabbit ran away?"), expansion questions ("Where do we have birds by our house?"), and even basic phonological awareness questions ("What rhymes with go?").



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**For children 6 years and older,** place consistent limits on the time spent using media, and the types of media, and make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity, and other behaviors essential to health.<sup>1</sup>



- For many households, putting limits on screen time is an ongoing battle. Establishing a routine and performing that routine every day lets children know what the expectation is and leaves less wiggle room for children to try to negotiate more screen time.



- Time is an abstract concept and may be difficult for some children to understand. Even as adults, 30 minutes may feel like 5 minutes if we are doing something we enjoy, and 5 minutes might feel like 30 minutes if we are doing something we don't enjoy. Using a daily visual schedule (as explained in [Handy Handout #492](#)), phone or egg timer ([Handy Handout #274](#)), and verbal reminders (e.g. "You have 5 minutes left on your tablet.") make screen time a more concrete concept for children and will let them know what to expect.



- A theory as to why screen time is associated with delayed language and cognitive development is that it takes away from the time that children would usually spend doing things that benefit development, such as playing with toys (as explained in [Handy Handout #446](#)), playing outside and physical activity ([Handy Handout #552](#)), interacting with parents and peers, and sleeping ([Handy Handout #480](#)). Ensure that your family has time for the activities scientists know improve language and thinking in children.

**Designate media-free times together,** such as dinner or driving, as well as media-free location at home, such as bedrooms.<sup>1</sup>



- Simple, day-to-day tasks leave so many opportunities for language learning! Meal times are great for practicing new vocabulary and conversational skills. [Handy Handout #407](#) has tips on how to start conversations with children about their day. Children are a captive audience in the car. Use rides to talk about your surroundings or play language games (some are mentioned in [Handy Handout #402](#)).



- Your family can even establish fun, media-free time, such as a game night, arts and crafting time, or story time.

**Have ongoing communication about online citizenship and safety, including treating others with respect online and offline.<sup>1</sup>**



- Monitoring media behavior presents new challenges to any caregiver. When teaching your children how to treat others, make sure you apply those same beliefs and standards to their online usage. If you would not say it to someone's face, you should not say it to the person online.



- [Handy Handout #491](#) has tips on how to monitor children's media usage, and [Handy Handout #545](#) explains cyberbullying.

The AAP recommendations do not suggest avoiding exposure to media entirely throughout childhood. Media can sometimes be a powerful tool for learning, and learning how to use it appropriately is now a part of growing up. Also, media helps most families get through the tough days. Sometimes children need a distraction while waiting in a long line. Sometimes a parent just needs a break. These recommendations are not meant to scold or worry parents. Instead, the recommendations should be used as a tool to guide parental judgement and take steps towards happier, healthier households.

Resources:

<sup>1</sup> "American Academy of Pediatrics Announces New Recommendations for Children's Media Use," American Academy of Pediatrics, last modified October 21, 2016, <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/American-Academy-of-Pediatrics-Announces-New-Recommendations-for-Childrens-Media-Use.aspx>

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