Tips for Families:

Screens and the Early Years

Screens and digital devices are a part of life for many families – especially since the pandemic. While experts do not recommend any screen time for children under two years of age and less than an hour a day for those between the ages of two and five, you need to do what's right for your family.

Remember that your child learns best from face-to-face time with you. Screens can't replace that. But screens can have some benefits if you use them right.

Set rules

Try this:
- Plan when, why, how long and who will be using screens. *"Let's watch this show after lunch so we can learn about ocean animals. We can keep it on for 20 minutes."*
- Turn off screens and leave devices aside for at least one hour before bed. Looking at screens right before bed can affect the hormone that helps a child fall asleep.
- Set "screen-free" times. During these times, no one in the family uses a device.

When your child is using a screen, watch it with them

Try this:
- When watching TV, using apps or reading e-books with your child:
  - Connect what is happening on the screen to real life. *"We went swimming in a lake like those kids!"*.
  - Ask questions, *"What just happened?"*, *"What do you think will happen next?"*.
  - Talk about what you see. *"The astronauts are on a big rocket ship!"*.

Limit the time you are on a device when around your babies and kids

Try this:
- Put away your device during mealtimes or when you are playing with your child. Kids copy the adults in their lives so if you are using a device, they will want to use one too.
- Be face-to-face with your child without screens whenever you can.

Choose appropriate shows, games and apps

Try this:
- Pick programs that:
  - Are made for your child's age group.
  - Have specific educational goals.
  - Are interactive.
  - Have people or characters talking to each other.
- Visit these links for fun and educational ideas:
  - [Children and Media: Tips for Parents](#)
  - [Tips for Choosing Appropriate Applications and Media for Children](#)
  - [How to Choose Truly Educational Kids' Media](#)
  - [How Families Are Using Educational Media At Home](#)

Avoid keeping the TV on in the background

Try this:
- Only turn on the TV for one show and then turn it off when the show ends. Having the TV on all the time can affect your child's language and attention skills. It can also distract you both from spending face-to-face time together, which is so important for learning.
- Turn off the TV when the news or another program meant for adults and older children comes on.

Please visit www.childrensliteracy.ca for more tips!

Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation

Fondation pour l'alphabétisation des enfants canadiens

Early Words
A program of the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation
Talk, Read, Sing

Common Questions:
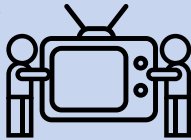# Screens and the Early Years

If parents ask...

You can tell them...

| **Will screen time delay my child's language skills?**	It depends on their age. Children under 12 months who have a lot of screen time have been shown to have more language delays. Young kids do not learn much from screens at this age. They learn the most from adults in real life so be sure to read, speak, sing, play and cuddle together!
Is it okay if my baby uses screens to video chat with family?	Yes. Talking with family members over video chats can help build relationships. Even babies can pick up when an adult is talking directly to them. They get more from a grandparent talking to them on a video chat than from hearing a character talk on a show.
Doesn't it help a child calm down when they spend time quietly looking at a screen?	No. When a child is given screen time to calm down, it could lead to problems with learning to set limits and control their feelings. Studies show kids who have lots of screen time in early childhood tend to have a harder time regulating their behaviour.

Is reading an e-book as good as reading a printed book?

It's hard to know. Some studies say both e-books and printed books support early learning. Other studies say printed books are better at teaching early reading and language skills and help a child and adult to bond. Enjoy e-books with your child if you prefer them, but don't leave printed books behind – they have so many benefits. With printed books:

- Children learn important skills like turning pages and figuring out how to hold a book the right way up.
- Children focus on the meaning of story. They can point to words or pictures without distractions like sound effects or animations.
- Parents focus on talking to their child about the story rather than how to use the device.
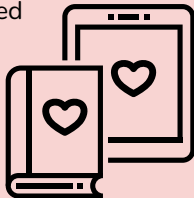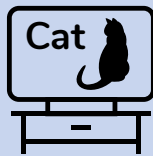
Is there anything good about screen time?

Yes. Screens can support learning if they are used right and an adult is involved. But screens are not a substitute for face-to-face time with an adult.

Television shows that are well-designed and age-appropriate can:

- Help a child's language and literacy skills (if the child is over age 2).
- Introduce important topics like learning about different cultures.

Apps that are interactive and when an adult participates with a child can:

- Build early literacy by giving the child a chance to practice recognizing letters, sounds and words.

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