

Technology and media in child care

Media screens are everywhere—television, smartphones, touch pads, e-books, computers—and new ones are hitting the market frequently. Parents and educators are raising and teaching children in an era when the abundance of digital media presents unique challenges as well as educational opportunities. Limited research shows that there can be many negative effects on young children through early exposure to specific types of screen time. Knowing how to manage this technology and use it appropriately is critical for early educators.

Television is still the most common form of technology to which young children are exposed. Studies vary in the average reported amounts of viewing time for 2- to 4-year-olds, but one study indicated as much as thirty-two hours per week. Forty percent of 3-month-old infants are regular viewers and as many as 30 percent of infants less than a year old have a TV in their room.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children under the age of 2 have no screen time (including TV, computer, DVD, or video games) and that children over the age of 2 have no more than one hour total per day. Recommendations from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) (2011) encourage limiting screen time for children ages 2–5 to fewer than thirty minutes per day for children in half-day early learning programs and no more than sixty minutes for those in full-day early learning programs. Both the NASEM and AAP stress that caregivers work together with parents to ensure that children over 2 years are limited to no more than one hour of *total, quality* screen time per day. Additionally, screen time should be viewed with an adult who can help the child process and understand what they are seeing.



What are the concerns?

Key concerns related to screen time for young children include:

- Increased sedentary time that can lead to overweight or obesity.
- Impact on ability to focus and concentrate on tasks.
- Exposure to violence that has been shown to be related to increased bullying in school-age years.
- Marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages.
- Difficulty in distinguishing between pretend and real life.
- Exposure to adult situations they may have difficulty processing or understanding.
- Replacing creative play, which is so critical for growth and development of social and cognitive skills.
- Problems with sleep.

Even having the television as background noise can expose children unknowingly to situations they find confusing or scary, especially without an opportunity to talk through them with a caring adult.

Are there positives to technology use in early childhood programs?

According to the NAEYC position statement developed in 2012, there can be some effective ways to integrate technology into early childhood education though there are important factors to keep in mind.

1. Screen use must be interactive so that it enhances the educational experience, not just passive viewing.
2. Providers must be educated so that they can know and are familiar with appropriate uses of *interactive* technology with children aged 2 and older.
3. Engaging families in the conversation about appropriate media and technology use at home is critical to support management of the influence of technology in the classroom.

Technology used appropriately can provide support in early childhood education settings as well. For example, assistive technology for children with special needs can enable them to accomplish tasks that otherwise might not have been possible. Certain media (i.e., digital photos or email) can be used to help build relationships with parents. Technology has also been shown to be helpful for dual language learners by providing information in their home language while they are learning English.

Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education. 2019. *Preventing Childhood Obesity in Early Care and Education: Selected Standards from Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards; Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs, 4th Edition.*

Levin, Diane E. 2013. *Beyond Remote-Controlled Childhood: Teaching Young Children in the Media Age.* NAEYC: Washington, DC.

Summary

There is no doubt that screen time for children needs to be limited. Realistically, digital media use and availability is on the rise in current culture and more research is needed to study the immediate and long-term effects. Managing the use of screens and communicating with parents are critical for smart use of digital media with and by young children.



NAEYC. January 2012. "Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8." NAEYC Position Statement.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2011. "[Early Childhood Obesity Prevention: Policies, Goals, Recommendations, and Potential Actions.](#)"

Puerling, Brian. 2012. *Teaching in the Digital Age: Smart Tools for Age 3 to Grade 3.* Red Leaf Press.