



Be Tech Wise With Preschoolers!

Creating a Health Technology Environment for Your Preschooler

Preschoolers are busy and curious. They are learning to share their thoughts and feelings, connect with new people, and make friends. They see smartphones and other screens all around them. You may be wondering how screen time can affect your child's development.

Did you know?

During the preschool years, a child's communication skills develop quickly. Most children use 4- to 5-word sentences, start new conversation topics, and show more interest in reading and drawing.

Preschoolers need lots of opportunities to play and interact with others—these are the main ways they learn. Communication and social skills grow through talking, reading, and playing with loving adults. Too much screen use takes time away from these healthy activities.

What does your preschooler need to build communication and social-emotional skills?

- **Nurturing, warm adults who respond to their words and actions.** Name and help your child understand their feelings. ("You sound sad. You weren't ready to say good-bye yet. Saying bye is hard!")
- **Help expressing their feelings in healthy ways.** ("I can tell you are frustrated! Let's go run around outside!")
- **Time to pretend, imagine, and create.** Playing with toys such as dolls, puppets, blocks, cars, and dress-up clothes helps build your child's brain. These toys also keep children busy—no screens or batteries needed.
- **Lots of language.** Keep conversations flowing in the car, during errands, and at bath and mealtimes. Sing songs together. Ask your child about their day, and answer their questions. Talk about how other people feel to help build your child's social-emotional skills.

Help Your Preschooler Thrive:

Provide **non-electronic toys** that let them use their imagination.

Encourage **play** with other children.

Spend time **talking, singing, and reading** books together every day.

How Much Screen Time?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends **no more than 1 hour a day** for children ages 2 to 5 years. When viewing shows or videos, do so with your child—and talk about what you're watching.



Screens and Preschoolers—What Families Need to Know

You may be asking yourself the following questions:

Should I buy my child a tablet?

Try to hold off. Tech products are aggressively advertised to kids. They come in bright colors with popular characters to make them appealing. But giving children their own devices usually leads to more time on screens.

Does my child need apps to help them learn?

No. Companies try to fool parents into thinking that their products will make their child smarter. But real people and everyday activities provide more learning opportunities than any screen-based activity.

How can I occupy my preschooler while caring for a new baby?

Flipping through a book, coloring, or playing with toys can all entertain your child while you care for your baby. Your preschooler may also like to help you change diapers and feed their sibling. If a screen feels necessary at these times, try to limit screen use for the rest of the day.



Here's why screen-free time is essential:

- Children first learn to make friends as preschoolers. **Friendships exist between two people—not between a person and a screen.** Devices don't teach children to share or understand other people's thoughts and feelings.
- Too much screen time can **slow a child's speech and language development.** Delays in spoken language can lead to later challenges with learning and reading.
- Studies have found that higher screen use in preschoolers **can limit growth and development in the areas of their brain** that are responsible for attention, memory, and social skills.
- Children who use screens to calm down may have difficulty **managing their emotions.** Let kids be bored or angry for brief moments instead of distracting them with a screen. This prepares them to handle these emotions later in life.

A Healthy Tech Environment: Use These Tips to Help Your Preschooler Thrive

- **Read together.** This supports healthy relationships and language development. It sets kids up to do well in school.
- **Involve your child in household tasks.** Let them feed pets, put away laundry, and help prepare meals. Natural learning and communication occur through everyday routines.
- **Limit multitasking.** Put your phone down and make eye contact when speaking to your child. Listen fully—even for a short time. You'll reduce outbursts and better understand each other.
- **Set clear rules about places and times to use screens.** Use pictures or timers to help your child understand the limits. Set a good example by following screen time rules yourself.
- **Turn to your pediatrician, speech-language pathologist, and other experts for screen time guidance.** If you're worried about your child's communication, social, or learning skills, contact your school system for an evaluation.

For more information about your child's communication development, visit www.IdentifytheSigns.org.
For more information about screen time, visit www.screentimenetwork.org.