



Be Tech Wise:

Children With Developmental Delays or Differences

Creating a Healthy Tech Environment Where Your Child Can Thrive (Baby to Pre-K)

Raising a child today means making choices about technology almost every day. You want to do what's best for your child. But it's not always clear what "best" looks like—and figuring it out takes time, energy, and support.

This guide is here to help. It shares simple ideas for families with young children who have developmental delays or differences. The goal is to help you find a healthy balance with technology that supports your child's growth and well-being.

What To Know

Children with developmental differences are less likely to spend time reading and often have delays in pretend play. Building lots of screen-free time into their daily routines creates opportunities for them to practice these important activities and skills.

Did you know?

Children learn to make friends, have conversations, solve problems, and handle big feelings by playing, reading, and interacting with other people in real life.

Supporting Your Child's Focus and Growth

Kids may seem focused when they're on a screen, but apps and other screen-based content are **designed to keep children hooked for long periods of time**. This can make it harder for them to learn to concentrate or soothe themselves.

Screens also can overstimulate kids, which can hurt sleep, behavior, and more. Although parents might allow kids to use screens so that adults can get a much-needed break, too much time on devices can create behavior problems that make daily life more difficult in the long run—both for children and for caregivers. **Early screen habits predict later screen habits.**

Getting plenty of time for **screen-free play, outdoor activities, and social interactions** helps children develop skills that they'll need later for school and life—like these:

- paying attention
- handling emotions
- following rules and routines
- making good choices
- communicating feelings, ideas, and wants and needs

Setting clear boundaries around screen time is important. Screens can be hard for some children to step away from. This is especially true for children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), who may be drawn to the fast-paced content, or children with autism, who may have a hard time stopping an activity that they enjoy.



AAC vs. Screen Time

Some children may need extra support communicating and may use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). AAC comes in many different forms, which can include a tablet or a device. Using a device for AAC is different than using a device for “screen time.” AAC should always be available because it is a person’s voice.

If you think that your child may benefit from AAC, talk with a speech-language pathologist. They can help you figure out if AAC is right for your child—and, if so, find the best AAC tool for your child’s communication needs.

Tips in Action

Every child is different—and every family is, too. What works for one family may look different for another. With patience, you can create healthy screen-time habits.

Keep in Mind: Most screen-time guidelines are based on age instead of where a child is developmentally. Check with your child’s doctor and providers about what’s right for your family. The **Be Tech Wise** series shares important information to support you.

The ideas below can help you set limits on technology and support your child’s growth and well-being.

- **Make a family media plan.** Decide when, where, and how you will allow your child to use screens. Prioritize using that time for when you need to get things done (such as preparing dinner) or when you need a break.
- **Keep key moments screen-free.** Protect mealtimes, playtime, and bedtime. Turn mealtime and playtime into opportunities to talk and connect. Sing, read, and keep a consistent routine to help ease your child into bedtime.
- **Use screens together.** Even a few minutes of watching a show together can turn screen time into shared time with your child.
- **Set predictable routines and limits.** Clear rules like “one show before dinner” or “tablet after playtime” can reduce struggles. Tools like timers or passcodes may work well for some children. Sticking to limits might be hard at first. However, over time, these routines let children know what to expect.
- **Have calming alternatives ready.** A favorite toy, activity, or music can ease transitions away from screens.
- **Choose content carefully.** The quality of content is just as important as the amount of time spent on screens. Look for shows that present a clear story or theme, show characters interacting in positive ways, teach life skills and/or relate to your child’s daily routines (e.g., mealtime, bedtime), and avoid loud sounds or fast-moving visual effects.



For more information about your child’s communication development, visit www.asha.org/public.

For more information about children’s screen time, visit www.screentimenetwork.org.