



EARLY CONNECTIONS

Frequently asked questions

1. Should kids under 2 be exposed to media?

Young kids learn best through nurturing relationships with caregivers and loved ones. Therefore, we encourage parents to limit time with screen media for kids under 2, or to use media in limited ways as a means of furthering and cementing those relationships. Exploring new words, ideas, sounds, and more is also a useful way to use media if it's in small amounts. For instance, helping your child Skype with a grandparent in another country is a great way to build cross-generational relationships; showing kids a photo of themselves and naming parts of their face can be fun and help them build vocabulary. Our position echoes statements put out by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

2. What are some common exceptions parents make about using media with kids under 2?

- *Video chatting with faraway loved ones.* Maybe it's a grandparent in another country; maybe it's a parent on a work trip. Using screens this way **helps kids build bonds** with important people in their lives.
- *Listening to music.* Young kids love to shake, shake, shake to all kinds of different beats and sounds. Many families use noise machines at night to help lull babies to sleep. Playing music in the car and during stressful situations can also be calming. Encourage kids to move and shake to the music, and to make sounds themselves.
- *Reading books.* Many parents start reading to kids at an early age. Just the act of holding books and flipping pages can prime kids for a future love of reading. Over time, kids will also build vocabulary and comprehension.
- *When you're super busy.* Some parents worry that exposing their kid to *any* TV or screen time could be damaging. Take it from us; a little bit of media isn't gonna hurt. Especially in households with single parents or where caregivers work late, there are times when you need to plop your kid in front of the TV to have time to cook a healthy meal. What's most important is that kids know you love them and you spend plenty of quality time with them.

3. What devices are best to use with kids?

For kids 2-5, think about what you want to do with your kids. You may have no need for media at all, and that's totally fine. If you like showing them photos and short videos, your phone or a TV could be appropriate. Little kids pick up technology quickly, especially the tapping and swiping motions on interactive tablet games, so that might be a nice place to start. (Keyboards or small buttons can be a challenge because of their developing fine motor skills.) Choose a device that you will enjoy using with your child. You want to **make media a shared experience, so pick something that you can use and learn together**. There are also some great children's TV shows that you can watch and talk about together.

If you are interested in a more interactive screen experience, there are basically two categories of devices that have different benefits and drawbacks. One category is tablets and consoles made specifically for kids, like ones from LeapFrog and VTech. They're designed for kids' hands and will generally offer high-quality, kid-friendly content. Compared with all-ages tablets, the downside of these kid-friendly devices is that there's less content to choose from, the games and apps are usually more expensive, and they won't age up much past young elementary.

Tablets, interactive ereaders, and consoles designed for all ages, like the iPad Mini or iPad, Kindle Fire, or Android tablets, are generally more expensive than kid-friendly devices. But the apps and games for them are generally cheaper – although the quality is variable – and can serve more use for both parents and kids.

4. How can I find out more about what my child's early childhood provider is doing with media, and how can I offer information without stepping on toes?

Have a conversation with your kid's early childhood provider. Don't be afraid to **ask whether and how media is being used when your child is around**. If you're worried about interfering with their curriculum, you can ask if they have any media advice before you share the information that you know about children and media.

5. Can kids really learn from media like apps and websites?

Just as with books, some apps and websites are good for helping kids learn, and some aren't so hot. That's why it's important to do your homework! Much of the digital content that's created for young kids focuses on 123s, ABCs, shapes, and colors. These are fine fundamentals to learn, but some other skills – learning about feelings, cooperation, reasoning, forming questions – can also be learned in media and are some of the more overlooked skills.

6. How much should I be involved in my kids' media life when they're young?

Be as involved as you can be. It's really helpful to be involved so you can understand their line of thinking and talk about it with them. Reinforce the positive developments they're making and set boundaries where needed. Given the range of quality, it can be really helpful to play through digital content yourself before using it with your kids. You can find promotional videos on YouTube to get a taste, browse reviews at www.common sense.org, and use or play apps, games, and websites yourself. Importantly, your kids will learn more from these sources when you ask them questions, encourage them to explore, make connections to the offline world, discuss what's happening, and do related non-media activities with them.

7. What do I do if a parent of my child's friend has different media rules than I do?

It's helpful to first reflect on whether the difference in rules is bothering you or your child. If it's bothering your child, talk to him or her. **Explain why you have your set of rules** and that it's OK for friends and their parents to have their own rules too. If the difference in rules is bothering you, you can suggest to the other parents that the kids engage in non-media activities when they play together or share your concerns with the parent of your child's friend.

8. Will kids lose their handwriting if they type?

Keep in mind that handwriting and typing are two different skills. Practicing typing shouldn't negatively impact children's handwriting unless they aren't devoting time to writing. In short, it can be valuable for kids to experience a balance; **both skills are important to develop** as they grow. What's more, both writing and typing help develop fine motor skills. The ability to grip and scribble with a crayon, for example, will naturally precede a child's ability to intentionally touch a target object, which is required for typing.

9. How much should my kids be using devices when they're young?

Despite the great learning content within so much of kids' media, it can't completely substitute for learning that happens from hands-on, interactive engagement away from a screen. It's often helpful to **find a balance** between media and non-media activities so that your kids can explore and learn from the world around them both on and away from the screen.