



# EARLY CONNECTIONS

## Tips for parent engagement

It seems as if kids are naturally drawn toward screens and tech devices, and what's happening on them. Who knows if it's the light, the moving images, the music, the interaction, or the fact that adults they love are using them. As a parent, you can help harness this interest in screens and media – especially for kids 2 and above – to help kids learn and explore. Kids will get more out of media and tech when you guide them and help them make connections between media and their own life. What's more, everyone will get to spend quality time together doing something fun.

Here are tips for getting involved in your kids' media life:

### 1. Be fully present

Involvement can take many different forms, from discussing issues and feelings that arise when watching a show together to doing an offline activity together related to a website you've been using. "Being present" or "being in the moment" helps you tune in to kids' likes and dislikes, their strengths and challenges, and what they enjoy. Being present will help you tailor media choices to kids' needs and interests.

### 2. Use media to help your kids play

Kids learn through play, and media can be a big part of play. Encourage kids to role-play or make up stories about characters they see on TV. You can even play along with them or talk to them as if you're another character. Introduce them to games that encourage them to imagine, pretend, and try new things. When kids are encouraged to explore, experiment, discover, solve problems, and try harder, almost all play can be a learning experience.

### 3. Ask questions

You can make learning much more meaningful if you help kids make connections between what they're doing in their media play and what happens in real life. If two characters on a show are disagreeing, you might ask how they could solve the problem. Ask kids about what they're seeing and if it reminds them of anything they already know about. Ask their opinion, or if the same letters they're learning from an app are in their name or a friend's name, for example.

### 4. Boost fun and learning

Expose kids to different types of media activities. Kids can learn from websites, games, and apps. They can listen to stories, or tell the story themselves with media creation tools. They can take charge, take on challenges, get help and feedback, and play and share with friends and caregivers. Encourage kids to take risks and try different solutions.

## 5. Bring the fun off-screen

Look for ways to take what kids are doing with media into the world off-screen, which helps them make connections and puts the learning in context. Is your child learning about the sleep and eating cycles of different animals? Go to the library or zoo and learn more. Activities based on media can include art projects, science experiments, cooking, moving, singing, and talking. Ask open-ended questions: How did she solve that problem? Have you ever done something like that? What did you do? What happened? What do you think will happen next? Can you tell me about the game you're playing? What did you like or not like?

## 6. Get involved with a Family Media Night!

Create meaningful, shared family media experiences. Here are some tips on how to do it:

- Schedule it. Set a specific time for using media with your kids. Turn off all distractions and give it your full attention.
- Choose wisely. Choose a movie, TV show, app, game, or website that is age-appropriate, fun, goes with your values, and is interesting to you as well!
- Make it a theme. Choose a theme and elaborate on it. For example, do a color night where you watch a show about colors; explore colors on a website, app, or game; and use different colors to create art.
- Consult with your kid. Let your kids' interests be your guide. Does your kid love dinosaurs? Find TV shows, movies, apps, games, or websites that let you explore this world together.
- Play games together. They may be too young for Monopoly, but toddlers and preschoolers can get a lot out of playing games with simple rules together with loved ones. Good quality media and tech games make it easy: Rules should be easy to follow, and games should be relaxed. Get together for a friendly, low-key racing competition, or team up and challenge other teams. Let your kid initiate his or her own interactions, but be ready to provide help and back-up when needed.
- Talk about it. Discuss what you're seeing or doing. Ask open-ended questions and encourage your kid to ask you questions also.
- Bring the experience off-screen. Extend the experience by doing related off-screen activities that night, or in the future. Connect the experiences to related subjects that came up from your media night.