Early Intervention Clearinghouse

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Tech Talk

Today, parenting means finding a balance between time spent on devices and screen-free time. This isn't so different from days when parents were tasked with setting limits on what programs you could watch on TV, how close you were allowed to sit to the TV, and how many hours you could watch per day. Now that devices are mobile and potentially available all the time, there's an increased need for parents to monitor appropriate use of technology.

The American Academy of Pediatricians has some parameters for screen time:

- For children younger than 18 months, screen time should be avoided (other than video chatting).
- For children 18–24 months, you may watch digital media with your children. By watching media together, your children learn from watching and talking with you about the video content.
- For children ages 2–5, you may limit screen time one hour per day of high-quality programming. Again, watching together is best. This enables young children to be retaught in the real world what they learned through a screen.

How Do I Choose the Right Apps for My Child?

Today's children live in the digital age. They're surrounded by technologies such as tablets and smartphones. As a parent, you may have concerns about your child's technology use. However, if mobile applications (apps) are appropriately selected and used, they can support your child's learning and provide another opportunity for you to communicate and build a relationship with your young one.

Still, you might ask, "How do I know which apps are the best and most meaningful for my children?"

Below are four questions you should ask yourself when looking for age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate apps for your child.

How does this app help my child achieve his or her learning goals?

Before searching for an app, consider what your child needs right now and how the technology might support his or her development and learning. Do you want an app that can support your child's literacy, language, and communication? Do you want your child to hear a story?

For early learners, technology should not be used as a convenient babysitter. It should be used with meaningful purpose and to increase children's access to learning opportunities. Your child's IFSP can give you an idea of the goals and objectives you might want to address.

Is the app age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate for my child?

When choosing toys or apps for your child, it's important to be aware of your child's interests and what they are able to do at their current age. One size cannot fit all. Not every 2-year-old child has the same interests and learns in the same way. Try the app first before you introduce it to your child to make sure the app provides clear instructions and appropriate feedback, meets the needs of your child, and does not use inappropriate language and images.

Can this app foster a real-world connection?

Technology should be used to supplement learning and should not be a replacement for real-world exploration and face-to-face interaction. When selecting an app for your child, consider how its content might be used in a real-world context. How can you connect the app to your everyday routines?

Is this app engaging and challenging enough for my child?

Children learn best when they're engaged in activities that are challenging for them. Try to use the app with your child and observe whether it offers different levels of difficulty and is not too frustrating for your child to use.

We hope that answering these four questions will help you decide what learning apps are best for your child. But remember that interaction between you and your child is still what matters most. Limit the amount of time your child spends in front of a screen. To ensure that your child spends high-quality learning time with the technology, interact with him or her during their screen time. That's when technology can be most effective.

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A really simple rule to remember when it comes to screen time and young children is *engagement*.

To this end, let's consider how you can engage your child through technology. It is important for you to watch the media with your child and then discuss the content. For example:

- If you are watching a video about letters, you can work with your child to identify letters in your home or in the community. For example, if the video mentioned the letter "d," you can reiterate this later when you are having *dinner* or petting the *dog*.
- If your child has a doctor's or dentist's visit, you may watch a video about going to the doctor/dentist before your child's visit. This way, you can preview the upcoming visit with your child. This could also work if your child needs X-rays, surgery, or an invasive procedure.
- If you are trying to create a bedtime routine, you may include a lullaby or sleeptime video or song. This can become a tradition in your bedtime routine. Also, if your child is sleeping at grandma's house or is on vacation, you can use the lullaby or video in another location to maintain the bedtime routine there.
- If you are trying to introduce new foods, you may find a video about the new food. By sharing a video about the food and other children eating the food, you can help model that the food may taste good.

Remember, it is important to engage with your child about videos and use screen time selectively. When used appropriately and in moderation, technology can be a great tool!

Everyday Early Intervention: Technology Is Everywhere

Technology is a part of everyday life. It can also be a valuable tool for early intervention (EI) teams to use to share information and progress. Infants and toddlers learn more from interacting with their caregivers and the important people in their lives, such as siblings, friends, and other family members, than they can from technology alone. However, using technology side by side can promote learning and development. Here are some areas where using developmentally appropriate technology in your daily routines can help your child learn:

Motor Skills

Encourage your child to move and dance to music played on a tablet or other device. Record videos of your child's crawling, walking, or other motor skills to share information or questions about your child's progress with your EI team. Children also can develop hand-eye coordination and finger strength as they use simple technological elements such as buttons and switches.

Adaptive Skills

Encourage your child to use technology elements that are part of everyday life such as elevator buttons, drinking fountains, hand driers, and automatic doors with switches. While seemingly simple, these elements provide opportunities to discuss how the items work. It also introduces children to concepts such as cause and effect and lets them practice following directions.

Social-Emotional, Language, and Cognitive Skills

Young children love to see pictures of familiar people, places, and things. Look at photos and videos together and talk about them. Encourage children to name what they see and tell simple stories about the photos. Look for eBook versions of picture books with interactive elements. Picture communication apps can support your child's communication skills.

Managing Challenging Behavior

Use a stopwatch or visual timer app on your device to help your child know when an activity is about to end. You might try apps on a mobile device to create a checklist or picture schedule that will help your child know what is going to happen. Your child can help check off each item on the list or stop the timer's sound to help with the transition to the next activity.

For more information, visit the Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse at https://eiclearinghouse.org

Technology Resources for Families of Young Children

Boosting Brain Power: 52 Ways to Use What Science Tells Us
Jill Stamm
Gryphon House, 2016
BF 723 .C5 .S73 2016
Also available as an **eBook**
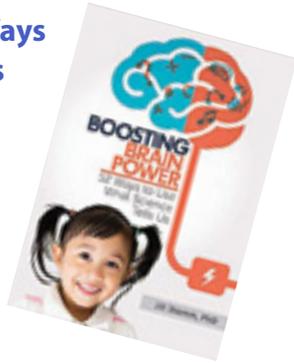
Raising Humans in a Digital World: Helping Kids Build a Healthy Relationship With Technology
Diana Graber
Thomas Nelson, 2019
Available only as an **eBook**

Calling All Minds: How to Think and Create Like an Inventor
Temple Grandin
Philomel Books, 2018
Q 164 .G67 2018
Also available as an **eBook**

Screen-Free Fun: 400 Activities for the Whole Family
Shannon Philpott-Sanders
Adams Media, 2018
GV 182.8 .P55 2018
Also available as an **eBook**

Game On! Screen-Free Fun for Children Two and Up
Linda J. Armstrong
Redleaf Press, 2018
GV 1201 .A76 2018

Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens
Lisa Guernsey & Michael Levine
Jossey-Bass, 2015
LC 149.5 .G93 2015

Technology and Digital Media in the Early Years
Chip Donohue, Ed.
Routledge, 2015
LB 1139.35 .C64 D7193 2015

Techwise Infant and Toddler Teachers: Making Sense of Screen Media for Children Under 3
Patricia Cantor & Mary Cornish
Information Age, 2016
LB 1139.35 .C64 C37 2016
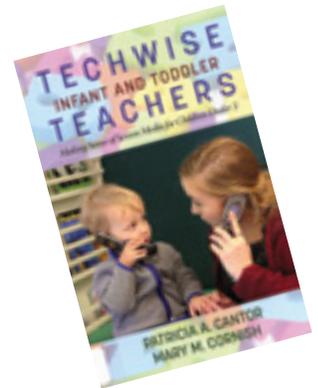
Digital Decisions: Choosing the Right Technology Tools for Early Childhood
Fran Simon & Karen Nemeth
Gryphon House, 2012
LB 1139.35 .C64S56 2012
Also available as an **eBook**

Website
Zero to Three's Screen Sense
This parent-friendly resource summarizes the research on screens and the impact on children under age 3. It also includes tips on how to make the most of video chats, choosing media content for young children, and screen-use tips for parents of young children. Use the QR code to go to the website or visit https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/screen-sense

eBooks Are Here!

You can now check out and download eBooks instantly, using the cloudLibrary app on most devices. For more detailed instructions, visit **eiclearinghouse.org/resources/library/ebooks/** or click on the icon on the right.

SSIP Update: A Focus on Coaching Skills

A primary focus of early intervention services is enhancing the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of their infant or toddler. We do this through the provision of family-centered services.

These services are intended to promote family participation in the decision-making related to their child and to support families in achieving the outcomes they have for their child and family. This occurs through active engagement in service provision.

The State's Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) has a strong focus on family engagement. We believe that supporting families in their efforts to help their children develop and learn will lead to improvements in infants' and toddlers' development as well as improved acquisition and use of knowledge and skills.

Providers in our pilot sites will be working on enhancing their coaching skills and providing services within the context of families' daily routines. We are excited to see how these changes impact families' efforts to support their children develop and learn!

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