

Screen time and screen practices

Good screen practices are important for the overall health and wellbeing of young children.

Good screen practices for young children centre on the quality and nature of their activity online, as well as parents and carers modelling good screen habits and being actively engaged in their child's screen time.



Be actively engaged

Engaging in quality content with your child can be a positive experience for them and can promote learning and development.

Decide which activities will be ‘explore together’, ‘supervised’ and ‘independent’.

The level of supervision required will depend on the nature of the activity and the readiness of your child.

Explore together

These are activities in which you sit alongside your child and you are both fully engaged. The screen remains within your sight at all times. Explore together activities should include all new games, apps, websites and programs.

- Describe what you are thinking and doing and ask questions — ‘I wonder what will happen when we tap here?’
- Practice taking turns with your child.

Supervised

During supervised activities your child is the one controlling the screen, but they are talking to you about what they are watching or doing. You may be nearby in the same room engaged in another activity, like cooking, as you talk with them. Supervised activities should involve content your child is familiar with.

- If a game or activity can be played offline, turn airplane mode on or disconnect from wi-fi.
- Ask lots of questions and encourage your child to show you things, so you can stay engaged in what they are doing.

Independent

When your child is engaged in independent activities, they are watching and exploring online by themselves. You are still nearby in the same room. Independent activities should only include games, apps, websites and programs you and your child know really well.

- Make sure your child knows they can come to you if they are unsure about anything or they see or experience something that makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Check in with your child every so often and ask what they are doing or watching.



How to balance screen time

How much time should your child spend online?

You know your child.

Consider your child's screen use in the context of their overall health and wellbeing. The Department of Health provides recommendations in its 24-Hour Movement Guidelines on levels of physical activity, sedentary activity (such as screen time), and sleep for children.

Tips for managing screen time

You may be accustomed to 'tech tantrums', or your toddler or preschooler having a tantrum because their screen time is over. It is normal behaviour for children to not want to stop a fun activity, whether it is online or not.

Use a timer — decide on the right amount of time and use a timer or a screen time monitor that blocks access. This is especially useful for very young children as they see it as the device 'turning off', not you imposing a rule.

Talk about a set amount of screen time before your child starts to play or watch — this may help them stop when their time is up.

Help them transition to another activity — in the last five minutes of your child's screen time, sit with them and engage with what they are doing. You could also suggest you draw or make a character from your child's favourite program or game together.

Agree on device-free times — talk together as a family about when everyone should put their devices down. Depending on your routine, this may be during meals and at night.

Turn off devices an hour before bedtime — research shows it is important to turn devices off at least an hour before bedtime to ensure your child has the best quality sleep.





eSafety Commissioner

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