

Helping 0 to 3 year olds thrive in a digital world



Our very young children are growing up in a digital world. Media is part of their environment. There are joys and risks, just as there are in the real world. So we need to help our children navigate them just as we do for the real world.

Here are some thoughts and suggestions to support you.

FOR YOUR CHILDREN THE REAL WORLD MATTERS AND YOU MATTER MOST OF ALL.

Babies and toddlers develop understanding of themselves and their world through interacting with real people, places and things and, most especially, through their interactions with you.

So READ, PLAY, TALK, and SING together every day to build their language, their speech, their emotional understanding and their confidence, so they will engage, and thrive, as they grow towards their future.

HOW YOU CAN USE MEDIA WISELY WITH 0 TO 3 YEAR OLDS

Use media sparingly: Many authorities recommend no screen time for the first couple of years, and then very little until school age. WHY? Because it's important for children to spend their time connecting with you, their family, other living things and the natural world. Screens should not come to dominate their lives. Think of screens as being like sweet treats: fine if used occasionally for enjoyment but unhealthy if they are the everyday substitute for real life.

Choose media wisely: Just as you are cautious about those who take care of your children (childcare staff, babysitters), check the media with which your children interact. There are positive children's programs, videos and apps for this age, but most are of little learning value, and some can be quite damaging. Be just as careful choosing good media as choosing good food. Your child's mind, heart and spirit are best supported through language and experiences based in the real world.



Share media companionably: Children want to share what they enjoy, and that includes their media experiences. Take the time to join in. Share how you feel about what you are both viewing so your children gradually develop the words and the confidence to express their own feelings including joys, anxieties or confusion. Encourage them to do so.

Expand media experiences: Children will see and hear things on screens that can be used to motivate other shared experiences. Encourage them to dance with those on screen. Sing screen songs with

them at other times. Provide screen related toys so they can play with them when the screen is silent; you may have to suggest things to do with the toys rather than just repeating what they saw on screen.

THE MEDIA YOUNG CHILDREN PREFER

Infants enjoy bright contrasting colours, simple shapes and slow movements (think mobiles), warm human voices, music (tastes vary), and familiarity achieved through patterns and repetition.

Toddlers enjoy all this and more: simple rhymes, songs and narratives, different characters (eg puppets, animals with human characteristics, children) and are developing their own special interests (eg trains, dinosaurs, volcanoes, unicorns).

THE MEDIA YOUNG CHILDREN DO NOT ENJOY

Infants can be frightened by sudden loud noises, harsh voices and fast moving images, and are disinterested in media that lack the elements that they enjoy.

Toddlers can also be frightened by grotesque characters, threatening images (eg. claws, display of teeth/fangs), mistreatment of animals or children, and 'dark' atmospheres/moods/music. They may also be developing personal dreads such as big dogs and clowns. Scary images experienced when young can lead to anxieties and fears which sometimes stay with children for years.

HERE ARE SOME HEALTHY AIMS

As far as is possible:

- Let them be screen media free until 18 months old (apart from video chats with loved ones);
- Have a daily range of engaging activities of which screen use is just one;
- Only choose high quality children's television and digital screen programs;
- Limit screen time to one hour a day between the ages of 2 and 3;
- Enjoy screen time together;
- Keep your phone for yourself until they are older.

POSITIVE MEDIA MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

It's important to have some! Consider when, what and how you want your children to access media.

1. **Do a little homework.** View each program /play each game/ use each app before your children do. Check on-line reviews for apps: <https://childrenandmedia.org.au/app-reviews/> and for movies <https://childrenandmedia.org.au/movie-reviews/>

Movies in cinemas can distress a toddler, so be cautious. Check classifications; choose content consistent with your values. Make choices that are happy, healthy and will help your children thrive.

2. **Find some time to share in what they watch or play.** Laugh, talk, ask questions, express feelings, link content / themes to their own real life experiences, separate advertisements from storylines.
3. **Share your expectations,** and set guidelines with all who help rear your children. While these will change as your child grows, it's important to have a clear and consistent base from which to work.
4. **Set simple, clear guidelines in advance and stick with them.** Alert children when screen time is soon to end. Provide appealing activities for when the screen is shut down. Expect some tantrums.
5. **Replace screens with things that are REAL** – real people, real places, real challenges, real triumphs!

Feel confident as a parent!

It's real life, shared with you, not media experiences, that builds young children's brains, language and speech, physical strength and coordination, understanding of their world, confidence, character, wellbeing and spirit.