

Thinking About Screen Use:

3 to 4 Years

Preschoolers are in a world surrounded by screens. Screens are on phones and tablets. They see adults use screens to pay at a store, to order food, and to check train or bus times. Of course, preschoolers want to use screens too — they want to be like you!

At the same time, their brains need lots of opportunities for play, movement, and exploring in the “real world.” These experiences help them learn the important skills they’ll need in kindergarten. And they need *you* for this important learning.



Wondering about screen use with your child?

Here's where to start.

1 Children respond to screens differently. Some children don't care much about screens. Others ask for them all the time. Knowing how *your* child responds can help you develop healthy limits for them. Remember, preschoolers still learn best by playing and exploring in the “real world.”

2 Quality matters. Beware of apps and games labeled “educational.” Did you know that companies don't need any proof to say it? If you choose to let your child use screens, pick shows and games made by trusted sources like PBS KIDS. Shows like Blue's Clues or Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood are great! They have research to show these programs help children learn facts, healthy behaviors, and how to manage feelings.

3 Avoid long periods of screen time. Try to keep screen time a small part of the day. Turn off auto-play on streaming services. If your child watches YouTube, make a playlist of high-quality videos for them.

4 Avoid harmful content. Skip anything scary or violent. Watching scary videos or games can be harmful to young children. Even though your preschooler might seem like a “big kid,” they are not ready for this type of content yet. Keep it fun and just right for their age.



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



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Use screens *with* your child.

Watch shows or play games together. Talk about what is happening. What do they like about the show? Help them connect the show to real life. If your child is playing a game where they are making a cake or racing a car, try baking “in real life” or having toy car races across the room.

6

Children are learning how to calm themselves.

Children often depend on screens to help them wait, get over disappointment, or feel better when they’re sad. That is ok sometimes. But learning how to cope with big feelings on your own is important. It is a big part of growing up! Help your child learn ways to manage feelings without a screen. Children need time to learn this skill for life.

7

Keep bedtime routines screen-free.

Children who use screens right before bed tend to go to sleep later. They wake up more at night, too. Bedtime is a great chance to connect with your preschooler. Building a sleep routine that is all about cuddles, stories, and love helps everyone get better sleep.

8

Think about how screens fit into your day.

Too much screen use can get in the way of playing, moving, reading, and connecting with family. Make sure your child has a good mix of activities each day. Keep screen time a small part of the daily schedule.

9

Remember, it’s never too late to change screen time rules.

You are in charge, and your child will adjust. Hang in there. It may be tough at first, but your child will get used to it!

10

Be aware of your own screen use. Phones and other screens can be big distractions for adults, too! Staying off screens most of the time helps caregivers connect with their growing preschoolers.

Have more questions?

Talk to your child’s healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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