

Healthy media use

Through digital media we communicate with each other freely and entertain ourselves endlessly. Any type of information we want is just a click away. Computers, tablets, cell phones, video games and television are all around us, and the influence of media is everywhere.

Raising children in this digital age is filled with opportunity and also with challenges. The early years are a critical time in making healthy media choices and developing good habits that nurture positive growth. How can families successfully structure and navigate the virtual world on behalf of their young children?



Healthy media activities

- Engage with your child in their media experience to help your child develop socially, promote language development and enrich learning.
- Be selective about your child's media experiences and look for open-ended, creative opportunities that generate conversation.
- Balance media time with playtime. Make unplugged playtime a daily priority. Keep family mealtimes and other social gatherings tech-free.
- Use parental control settings that keep your child safe from inappropriate Internet content. Check out the excellent parent resources at: commonsensemedia.org

Unhealthy media activities

- Passive viewing, content with adult or violent themes, fast-paced frenetic imagery and repetitive click-and-swipe game experiences.
- Using technology to manage behaviour: Media can be very effective in keeping kids calm and quiet, but it should not be the only way they learn to calm down. Children need to be taught how to identify and handle strong emotions, come up with activities to manage boredom, calm down through breathing, talking about ways to solve a problem, and finding other strategies for channeling emotions.
- Allowing children to access media whenever and wherever they please: Tech use is often sedentary. Kids need to be active to be healthy.

"Screen time in the preschool years should be limited. Instead of screen time, children can be encouraged to engage in unstructured free play (especially outdoors and in nature), physical activity (e.g., playing at the park, dancing to music), pretend play, dress-up, exploring, imagining, building, looking at and listening to books, playing with other children, creating (e.g., create a craft box) and fine motor skill activities (e.g., puzzles, beading)."

— **Dr. Joelene Huber**, Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto, and medical journalist.



"Video gaming before bed creates stress that leads to poor sleep; reading a book before bed creates relaxation that leads to restorative sleep."

— **Dr. Stuart Shanker**, The MEHRIT Centre