



# Beyond Screen Time: Help Your Kids Build Healthy Media Use Habits

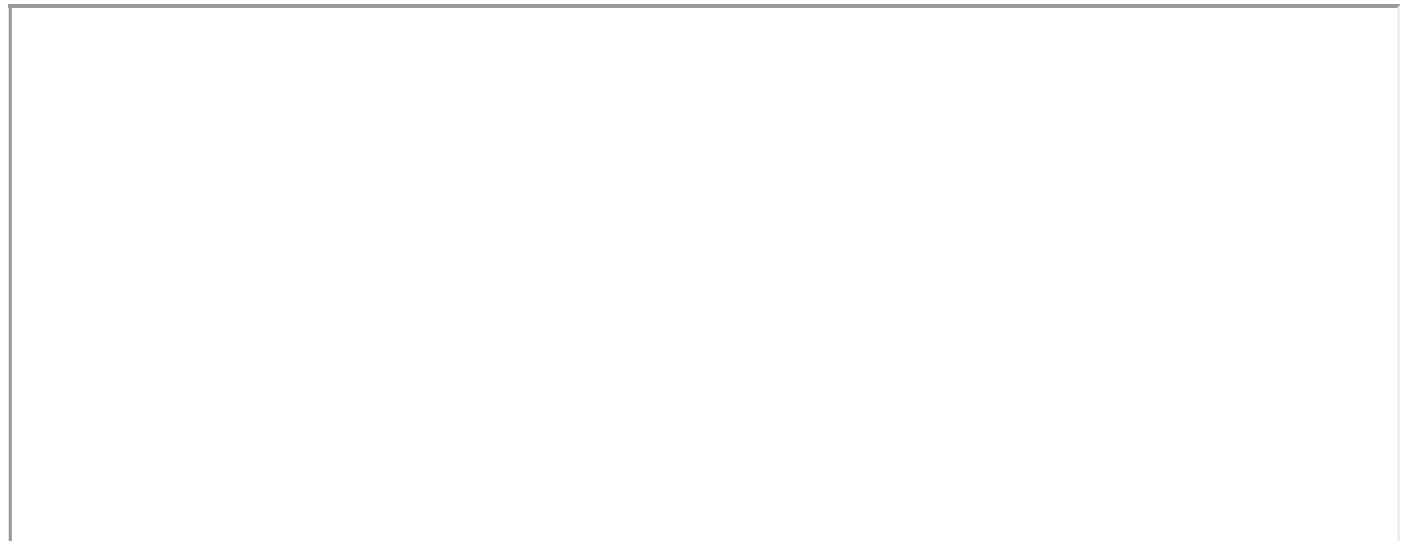
Media in all forms, including TV, computers and smartphones can affect how children feel, learn, think and behave. However, as a parent, you are still the most important influence.

Read on for tips on how to help your children develop healthy media use habits early on.

## Media use and your children

There are risks and benefits (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Adverse-Effects-of-Television-Commercials.aspx) that come with media use, and the key is to develop habits that help your family strike a healthy balance. You can decide what media use is best for your family. Remember, all children and teens need adequate sleep (8–12 hours, depending on age), physical activity (1 hour), and time away from media. (See the "Media Use Guidelines" chart, below, for general guidelines for media use based on age.)

Because children today are growing up in a time of highly personalized media use experiences, parents must develop personalized media use plans for their children. Media plans should take into account each child's age, health, personality, and developmental stage.



Create a Family Media Plan online at [HealthyChildren.org/MediaUsePlan \(/MediaUsePlan\)](https://healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan). This lets you give consistent expectations and limits on media use that will help your kids balance media use with other healthy activities.

Media Use Guidelines for Families			<a href="#">Back to Top</a>
Age	Description	Media Use Guidelines	
<b>Younger than 2 years old</b>	<p>Children younger than 2 learn and grow when they explore the physical world around them. Their minds learn best when they interact and play with parents, siblings, caregivers, and other children and adults.</p> <p>Children younger than 2 have a hard time understanding what they see on screen media and how it relates to the world around them.</p> <p>However, children 18–24 months of age can learn from high-quality educational media, IF their parents play or view with them and reteach the lessons.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media use should be very limited and only when an adult is standing by to co-view, talk, and teach (for example, video chatting with family along with parents).</li> <li>For children 18–24 months, if you want to introduce digital media,               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose high-quality programming.</li> <li>Use media together with your child.</li> <li>Avoid solo media use.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<b>2 to 5 years of age</b>	<p>At 2 years of age, many children can understand and learn words from live video chatting. Young children can listen to or join a conversation with their parents.</p> <p>Children 3–5 years of age have more mature minds, so a well-designed educational program such as Sesame Street (in moderation) can help children learn social, language, and reading skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limit screen use to no more than 1 hour per day.</li> <li>Find other activities for your children to do that are healthy for their bodies and minds.</li> <li>Choose media that is interactive, nonviolent, educational, and pro-social.</li> <li>Co-view or co-play with your children.</li> </ul>	
<b>5 years and older</b>	<p>Today's grade-schoolers and teens are growing up immersed in digital media. They may even have their own mobile device and other devices to access digital media.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make sure media use is not displacing other important activities, such as sleep, family time, and exercise.</li> <li>Check your children's media use for their health and safety.</li> </ul>	
<b>Tweens and teens</b>	<p>Tweens and teens are more likely to have some independence in what they choose and watch, and they may be consuming media without parental oversight.</p>	<p>Parents should engage tweens and teens in conversations about their media use, digital citizenship, what they've seen or read, who they are communicating with, and what they have learned from their media use.</p>	

## Healthy digital media use tips for families

Do not feel pressured to introduce technology early. Media devices are designed to be intuitive, and children can learn quickly.

- Find out what type of and how much media are used and what media behaviors are appropriate for each child—and for you. Place consistent limits on hours of media use as well as types of media used. [Back to Top](#)
- Select and co-view media with your child so they can use media to learn, be creative, and share these experiences with your family.
- Check your children's media use for their health and safety.
- Stop use of devices or screens for 1 hour before bedtime. Do not let your children sleep with devices such as smartphones.
- Discourage entertainment media while doing homework.
- Plan media-free times together, such as family dinners.
- Decide on media-free, unplugged locations in homes, such as bedrooms.
- Engage in family activities that promote well-being, such as sports, reading, and talking with each other.
- Set a good example. Turn off the TV and put your smartphone on "do not disturb" during media-free times with your family.
- Use sites like Common Sense Media ([www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)) to help you decide if movies, TV shows (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/TV-Ratings-A-Guide-for-Parents.aspx>), apps, and video games (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/Video-Games-Set-Your-Own-Ratings-System.aspx>) are age and content appropriate for your children and your family values.
- Share your family media rules with caregivers or grandparents to help ensure rules are consistent.
- Talk with your children and teens about online citizenship and safety. This includes treating others with respect online, avoiding cyberbullying (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/Cyberbullying.aspx>) and sexting, (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/The-New-Problem-of-Sexting.aspx>) being wary of online solicitations, and safeguarding privacy.
- Remember that your opinion counts. TV, video games, and other media producers, airers, and sponsors pay attention to the views of the public. For more information from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), visit <http://reboot.fcc.gov/parents> (<http://reboot.fcc.gov/parents>).
- Encourage your school and community to advocate for better media programs and healthier habits. For example, organize a Screen-Free Week in your town with other parents, teachers, and neighbors.

## More information

- Constantly Connected: How Digital Media Use Affects Your Child (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/Adverse-Effects-of-Television-Commercials.aspx>)
- Cyberbullying: What Parents Need to Know (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/Cyberbullying.aspx>)
- Sexting: How To Talk With Kids About the Risks (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/the-new-problem-of-sexting.aspx>)
- 5 Unhealthy Ways Digital Ads May Be Targeting Your Child (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/5-Unhealthy-Ways-Digital-Ads-May-Be-Targeting-Your-Child.aspx>)
- Your Child's First Cell Phone: Are They Ready? (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/cell-phones-whats-the-right-age-to-start.aspx>)
- Video Games: Establish Your Own Family's Rating System (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/Video-Games-Set-Your-Own-Ratings-System.aspx>)

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**Source** Adapted from Beyond Screen Time: A Parent's Guide to Media Use (Copyright © 2020 American Academy of Pediatrics)

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