

Media Guidelines for Kids of All Ages

 childmind.org/article/media-guidelines-for-kids-of-all-ages

Rachel Ehmke is managing editor at the Child Mind Institute.

Parents used to just worry about kids watching too much TV, or playing too many video games. We still worry about those things, but now the screen time list has gotten much longer. Phones, tablets, apps, social media, texting — they all can captivate kids (and adults) starting at a very young age. What's a parent to do? Going back to bed isn't an option, but taking a deep breath and encouraging rational moderation is. Here are some tips, broken down by age group, to get you started.

Very young children (0-4)

– **Limit exposure.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends avoiding television and other entertainment media for children under 18 months. After 18 months parents can begin introducing “high quality” programming, but the AAP cautions that parents should watch with their children to answer any questions they might have. For children two to five, the AAP recommends limiting media consumption to an hour of high quality programming, again with the caveat that parents should be watching alongside.

– **Start leading by example early.** Even before your child has a phone or tablet of her own, show her how they should be used. Don't check your messages at the dinner table. Look at people when they're talking to you — not at your phone. Remember that your children are always watching you and young children notice *everything* — that's how they learn.

– **Don't underestimate the value of traditional toys and open spaces.** It's important for kids to experience unstructured “free play,” which means that *they* decide what to do, and how to do it, and are playing simply for play's sake—not to get to the next level in a game, or learn some specific skill. Children should experience the fun of making up their own rules — and breaking them — as they go along. This kind of play lets kids:

- Move at their own pace, instead of being driven (or hurried) along by fast-moving media
- Develop creativity
- Get experience making decisions
- Practice sharing and working with others
- Learn to be a leader and self-advocate

Apps — however educational they claim to be — are no substitute for the kind of learning that comes to kids naturally if we let it.

- **Do leave the tablet at home.** While they are helpful during a long car or plane ride, tablets and other devices are out of place in the stroller or car on the way to preschool. It's important for kids to have the opportunity to look around them and find entertainment (not to speak of learning) in the real world, too. And they should not be part of play dates!