

# Uncharted Territory: 10 Technology Tips for Preschool Parents

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By Laurel Bongiorno, Ph.D

Parents today are making decisions about technology that didn't even exist when they were young. Parents make creative decisions daily using their best instincts.

Here are 10 tips that might help when making technology decisions for your child.

## **1. Use technology for communication.**

FaceTime or Skype with Grandma. Read a bedtime story together from afar. Email family and friends so children can know and communicate with extended family.

## **2. Model using technology as a tool.**

Take photos with your smartphone or iPad. Watch a short video of a volcano erupting, if your child shows an interest. Use the calculator to add. Use the magnifying app to examine nature. Listen to music on an iPod. Use the online dictionary to spell or find the meaning of words. Technology is an everyday tool.

## **3. Be involved.**

Resist the temptation to routinely use technology as a babysitter, and instead use it as a way to connect with your child. If you are reading a book on an e-reader, read together. Write emails together. Play games together. Look at science video clips together. Engage together.

## **4. Make sure your child is getting hands-on play experiences daily.**

Before you buy an iPad or other technology for your 3- to 5-year-old make sure he already enjoys building with blocks, creating artwork, reading books, engaging in dramatic play, and playing board games. And remember to provide plenty of playtime outside. Make real-world experiences the priority.

## **5. Create boundaries.**

Like a previous generation's creation of boundaries around watching television, you need to decide what is desirable for your child in terms of screen time, whether television, movies, computer, tablet, or cell phone. Is it 30 minutes a day? Is it when you need focused time to pay bills? Is it not interrupting their creative engagement? Establish your family's technology boundaries.

## **6. Be a critic for your child's sake.**

Pay attention to G ratings, but remember that the raters don't know your child—you do! If you decide on screen time, preview what they view and watch with your child to help her process what she sees. And consider the value of the apps you choose—are they active and do they promote creativity, innovation, and problem solving? Use the apps together so you can make a good decision. Make intentional choices.

## **7. Don't let technology get in the way.**

Family meals are a great time for conversation, catching up on the day, and developing relationships. Car rides are a great time for talking, singing, and playing games like I Spy. Cooking together not only supports relationships but also engages your child in using math and literacy skills. Consider whether technology is getting in the way of precious family time together.

## **8. Model healthy behaviors yourself.**

It's time to look in the mirror. Do you watch hours of television or movies each night? Is the television on in the background, even when no one is watching? Do you have your cell phone at the dinner table? Do you play games online in the middle of the night? Consider what your technology use models for your child. Your child learns from you.

## **9. It's okay to say no.**

There are plenty of families who live their lives without smartphones, cable, televisions, or computers. Follow your instincts for your family, and remember, technology companies market to you as a consumer, so be smart. Be intentional about your decision to add technology to your child's day—or not.

### **10. Be smart; be safe.**

Pay attention to your privacy settings. Share your rules about posting on social media with your friends and families. Make sure your early childhood program asks your permission before posting images of your child on Facebook or a website.

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**Audience:** *Family*

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