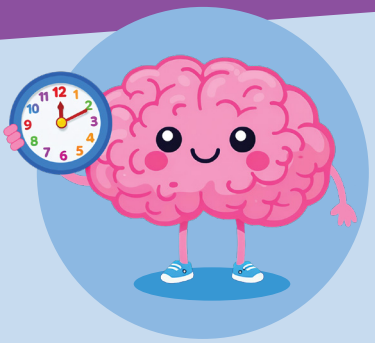
UK Government

NHS

A GUIDE TO SCREEN TIME

BEST START IN LIFE

How to help little brains develop healthy screen habits



How much screen time should my child have?

Limit total screen time, wherever possible.

Under 2 yrs: Avoid screen time except shared activities with family that encourage bonding and interaction.

2-5 yrs: Try to keep to 1 hour a day. Less if possible.

What content is better content?

Young children's brains are over-stimulated more easily than adults', so they need specifically tailored content.

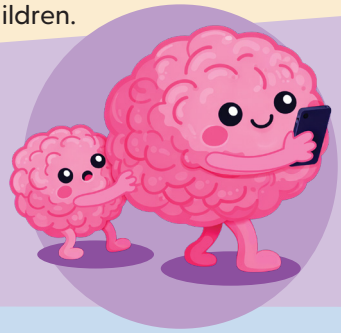
Slow paced content: Choose content with simple stories and clear, slow speech, so emotions are easy to follow.

Safe content: Use parental controls to block inappropriate, harmful material.

Social media: This isn't made for young brains, so it should be avoided.

AI: Don't let them use AI toys, tools, or chat-bots until we know more about their effects on children.

Safe screen swaps: Switch fast-paced style videos for slower-paced content with simple stories.



How does my screen use affect my child?

Lead by example: Children's brains are like sponges – they'll copy your screen use habits. Be mindful of how often you use screens around your child.

Set clear boundaries for screen use. This gives children time for activities and play that help them develop.

Avoid young children using screens alone. Try to keep bedrooms and mealtimes free from screens.

Why not try... watching and discussing content with your child? Conversation helps their development.

Safe screen swaps:

Mealtimes: Swap screens for music, games or conversation – make it social.

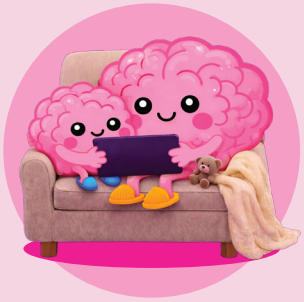
Bedtimes: Swap screens for bedtime stories 1 hour before sleep.

When and where is it okay for my child to use screens?

My child has SEND. Is the advice the same for us?

Children with disabilities or special educational needs may benefit from tailored screen use. And for some, assistive technology can be an important tool for communication and everyday participation.

They also need ample time for interaction, play, and sleep. Try to avoid screen time for these activities.



How does screen time affect my child's development?

Large amounts of screen time are linked with negative effects on children's health and development. It can affect social, emotional, language & brain development, sleep, eyesight and weight.

Young children learn best through warm interaction with parents and carers – reading, play and conversation. These early moments build the foundations for life.