

Balancing the Screen: A Note to Our Families on Screen Time

Having young children myself, I understand the joys and challenges of raising children. One question that comes up more and more in my consulting room is: "How much screen time is too much?"

We know that being a parent is filled with joyful firsts, but it can also bring natural worries. Between work, chores, and the sheer busyness of life, sometimes a tablet or TV feels like the only way to get a moment's peace. Please know that there is no judgement here—we are all just doing our best!

However, we know the early years of a child's life are when their brain develops the fastest. During the first year alone, more than a million new brain connections form every second. Because these moments shape your child's journey, it is important to think about how screen time fits into their day.

Why Does it Matter?

Evidence-informed guidance suggests that for our little ones, the focus should be on rich, responsive interactions. While screens are a part of modern life, they can sometimes get in the way of:

- * **Communication and Language:** Babies start life ready to grow, but they need us to talk and respond to them to develop these skills.
- * **Physical Play:** Moving confidently, balancing, and coordination are vital "gross motor skills" that children learn best through active play.
- * **Social Skills:** Learning to take turns and play cooperatively with others is a huge part of being "school-ready".

Simple Guidance for Every Stage

The government's **Best Start in Life** campaign provides helpful, practical advice on managing screen time for two main groups:

- * **For children aged 0–5:** This is the "critical 1,001 days" and beyond where foundations for lifelong health are laid. The goal is to build strong daily habits like chatting at mealtimes, sharing stories, and playing together instead of relying on screens.
- * **For children aged 5–16:** As they grow, the focus shifts to ensuring screens don't interfere with sleep, exercise, or schoolwork.

Tips for a Healthy Balance

1. **Prioritize "Serve and Return":** Think of interactions like a game of tennis—when your baby babbles or gestures, "return" the ball by talking back.
2. **Make Mealtimes Screen-Free:** Use these moments to chat and build vocabulary.
3. **Explore Together:** If your child is using a screen, try to watch or play with them so

you can talk about what is happening.

4. Get Active: Swap 20 minutes of screen time for a "buggy walk" or a trip to a local group.

Where to Find Support

You don't have to figure this out alone! For more trusted advice, videos, and tips tailored to your child's age, I highly recommend visiting *BestStartinLife.gov.uk*

You can also sign up for regular emails with NHS advice to help your child thrive.

Remember, as I regularly tell myself, it's about progress, not perfection. Small changes in your daily routine can make a massive difference in your child's development.

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