

What Parents Need to Know About Screen Time and Language Development

Parents want to make sure that the devices their children use actually promote language development.

Early childhood exposure to screen time is becoming more common as mobile devices and televisions are part of most households. That is the same time when children, especially those in their first 3 years, are having an explosion of language and acquiring their speech and language skills. Screen time, especially on mobile devices, can be useful to keep children entertained at home and on the go. However, children who have more screen time may have fewer chances to talk with others, affecting their speech and language development. Current guidelines recommend that children younger than 18 months should not have any screen exposure, and children aged 2 to 5 years should be limited to 1 hour of screen time per day.

Current studies show that screen time keeps children from hearing adult words. Children and parents both vocalize or talk less when children engage with screens. There are also fewer back-and-forth conversations between children and caregivers. Spending more time with screens, even background television, may result in reductions in speech. Having a language-rich home environment promotes strong language skills, school readiness, and healthy brain development. If a child does engage with screens, there are ways to support speech development. Some ways to watch and use screens are better than others.

View Together

When a child uses screens, parents should sit with them and watch together. This provides chances to interact, label items, and ask the child questions. Sharing screen time can support learning in a way that encourages speech development. Parents who view content with their child can apply what is seen during screen time later. They can model positive behaviors or apply new vocabulary words. Watching or using screens together can also help parents make sure that the content is right for their child's age.

Monitoring Content

Educational and age-appropriate content may help with language development. Shows, apps, and games that speak directly to children or ask them to respond can be helpful. Also look for media that label objects, colors, and feelings. It is also important to make sure that content and visuals are appropriate for the child. Bright colors, loud noises, and fast-moving scenes may be too overwhelming for young children.

Limiting Screen Time

Even high-quality screen time should be limited, especially for younger children who are in earlier stages of speech development. Setting limits on screen time and creating device-free areas in your home can help build healthy habits and boundaries for screen use. Too much screen time can take away from chances to play, look at

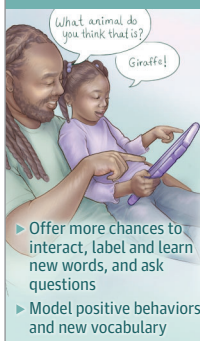
Screen time with devices such as mobile phones can be a common and helpful tool in households with young children, but too much screen exposure can affect a child's growth, especially speech and language learning.

Speech and language development accelerates during the first 3 years of childhood. Too much screen time has been shown to cause:

- Less exposure to adult speech and less vocalization
- Reduced conversational exchange between adults and children
- Reduced speech

While it may not be possible to be completely screen free, caregivers can engage screen time in ways that support child speech development.

Viewing screens together

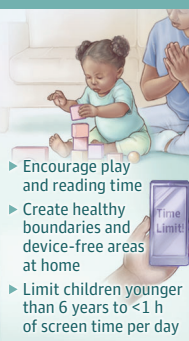


Monitoring content

- ▶ Promote engagement with educational or age-specific content
- ▶ Involve media that talk directly to children or label colors, objects, or feelings



Limiting screen time



books, or practice motor skills. While it may not be possible to be completely screen free, having clear rules and boundaries can support healthy language development.

Although even small increases in screen time can negatively affect childhood language development, families can still make screen time productive. Avoid screen use for children younger than 18 months. Limit children younger than 6 years to less than 1 hour of screen time per day. When children do use screens, practice covieing, encourage speaking, and choose educational, high-quality programs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Academy of Pediatrics

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/helping-kids-thrive-in-a-digital-world-AAP-policy-explained.aspx>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/why-co-viewing-is-important-tips-to-share-screen-time-with-your-kids.aspx>

First Things First

<https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/first-things/screen-time-and-young-kids/>

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Published Online: April 27, 2026. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2026.0125

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Conflict of Interest Disclosures: None reported.

Source: Brushe ME, Haag DG, Melhuish EC, Reilly S, Gregory T. Screen time and parent-child talk when children are aged 12 to 36 months. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2024;178(4):

369-375. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2023.6790

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