

Factual sheet on screen time for children aged 5 years and under

“The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommend children under the age of 5 to spend no more than one hour on any kind of digital device. With regard to babies, they should not be spending any time on digital devices on a daily basis”.

We are all fully aware that early childhood years is a period of rapid growth and development and a time when family lifestyles patterns can be adapted to promote health gains! It goes without saying that technology is forever changing, improving and becoming easier to use. Young children of this generation and future generations are growing up with constant technological advances on a regular basis. There has been data reports carried out on the direct and non-direct impact of children in the early years that having exposure and experience to screen time has advantages and disadvantages but the evidence is far from conclusive and more research into the effect of screen time on children is still required. The mixed evidence base has led to unclear and contradictory recommendations around screen time for children.

The question to ask one’s self is what constitutes ‘screen time?’ is constantly changing. That’s because newer technologies like tablets, smartphones and apps create different demands on the developing mind than television.

Yet it’s becoming coherently clear that children establish their activity and screen time habits early on. So it is an important topic for parents and early years practitioners to be mindful of.

Below are some helpful tips for you and your family when engaging in any form of screen time

Links to health and mental well being

- If your child is under the age of one please discourage them having any time on a digital device, such as smart phone, smart watch, tablet, all types of computers, kindles, etc
- When your two- to five-year-old has some screen time please permit the length to be no more than an hour and the content to be educationally appropriate with a responsible adult
- If children have long lengths of exposure to screen time some research has evidenced that it can affect your child’s health and cognitive development
- Having lots of screen time promotes more sedentary lifestyles such sitting around rather than being physically active
- Data research has also reported that lots of screen time can contribute to troublesome sleep patterns for young children
- One research that was especially done on children engaged in too much screen time found out that children who were on the study showed that it lowered their self-worth and self esteem
- In some cases particularly (one to three year olds) who watched TV showed increased levels of attention deficit disorders at the age of seven. Although a more recent review found that evidence for this was weak!
- Many experts say that passive watching is not the best thing to do either
- Avoid using digital devices during mealtimes and just before bedtimes to enhance good and healthy routines

Benefits to screen time

- High quality and educational programmes and apps help and support toddler's language development, mathematical concepts such as learning shapes, colours, numeracy and literacy
- Educational apps encourage little ones to use their listening skills and being interactive such as turn taking, meaningful experiences and socially interactive
- By allowing appropriate access to technology, we're encouraging children to learn important digital skills they'll need throughout their lives and careers
- Making sure the content you allow your child to engage with is right. Try using independent review sites such as fundamentally children and you can also tap into the NSPCC guides to online safety for children
- Know your child's limits as well as the adults. Set an allocated time you allowed to use your mobile phone, computer etc and then the child can copy and it make a great role modelling experience
- Try to see screen time as one activity out of lots of other options. Then think of lots of other things you could do outdoors and indoors, cooking, making a den in the garden, painting, playing a board game, etc. Make sure young children get at least 3 hours of active play a day.
- When your child is interacting in a programme encourage them to ask questions to promote their creative and thinking critically
- We all know that there is no substitute for little ones crawling, walking, climbing, exploring, interacting, playing, babbling and socialising. But, used sensibly and in moderation, screens can also have a useful place alongside this

As with everything, it's about finding the right balance and making it work for you and your family.