

AVG Technologies Digital Diaries: Setting Guidelines and Limits for Children Ages Two to Five

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These early years are all about milestones like potty training, starting school, first friendships, and yes, first interactions with gadgets, video games, and computers. The age at which kids are exposed to these new technologies keeps getting younger. AVG Technologies recent survey reports that while most small children can't swim, tie their shoelaces, or make breakfast unaided, they do know how to turn on computers, navigate with a mouse, play a computer game and—increasingly—operate their parents' smart phones and tablets.

The bottom line. Parents need to be thoughtful and proactive when it comes to these new digital technologies. Understanding your child's developmental stage and temperament will help you make wise decisions about appropriate screen interactions. Think through ways to get your child enough physical activity that happens away from the screen, and how to set limits so they can learn life skills. Little ones arrived in a digital world that was already up and running and we need to be deliberate in teaching that there is a great deal to be learned away from the screens. *Here are some tips:*

Start within. Sort through your feelings about technology so you can effectively help your child navigate this digital frontier. You may have differences with a relative or a parenting partner about screen time, so before setting limits reflect on your attitude and look into other perspectives. Also, know that your child is watching you and will want to emulate your technology experiences.

Build a strong foundation. Have a positive attitude while being in charge of your little one's day-to-day activities. When young kids get their hands on technology, they see a place where they're excited to explore and figure things out. Being involved and attentive will help them learn good computer habits and balance. Show enthusiasm while teaching them tech skills and life skills. Spend the time learning new technologies with your child and share in the enthusiasm.

Make a plan and set limits. The wonders of technology should be balanced with limits. Smart limits will help your child to get the most out of online and offline activities. It's similar to thinking about a healthy diet that has balance and nutrition. To be healthy and well rounded, young children need plenty of physical activity, creative play time, interaction with adults, and a good night's sleep.

The American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines recommend that children under the age of two have no screen time, and after age two they suggest limiting it to one or two hours a day. Look at your child's typical day and think about how much screen time should be allowed. Although this will vary based on your values and needs, keep in mind that a child's brain is developing rapidly during these early years.

Stick to your plan. If your child is good at begging and pleading for "just one more game," be strong knowing that you are setting the tone for the years to come. A kitchen timer is a great tool to help you and your child stick to agreements. If there's fussing when it's time to hand over the tablet, or turn off the computer, consider limiting screen use the next day. Engaging in computer technology is a privilege, not a necessity, in your young child's life. Children respond well to charts and schedules for when they're allowed screen time. It should be similar to what many parents have in place for other areas where limits are necessary. "After your show is over get your P.Js on and then you can have your bedtime story."

Reflect and reassess. Take a tech holiday. Perhaps you can have tech-less Sundays to reflect on your family's relationship with gadgets, smart phones, TV, computers, and social networks. Be deliberate about when your family decides to disconnect and question if your child is getting enough time for unstructured play, reading, learning to ride a bike, and family adventures outdoors.

Providing your child with quality content, limits, and parental involvement are all ways to ensure healthy development and positive family relationships.

Resources

- Common Sense Media: www.commonsensemedia.org
- Safe Kids: www.safekids.com/
- PBS: www.pbs.org/parents/childrenandmedia
- American Association of Pediatrics: www.aap.org/healthtopics/mediause.cfm

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