



Television and the Under 3 Crowd: Making Good Decisions About “Screen Time” for Young Children

American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendation

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no television (or screen media such as computer games, videos, or DVDs) for children under 2. For children over age 2, the recommendation is 1 to 2 hours per day for television (or any screen media).

For parents and caregivers who choose to allow their young children to watch some TV, consider the following research and guidance on viewing.

Television Plays a Limited Role in Learning

Although children may learn some concepts from watching educational programming, they learn best from interactive, hands-on experiences—touching, feeling, shaking, stacking, problem solving—with people they care about. Research has found that some children’s shows (such as *Arthur*, *Clifford*, *Dragon Tales*, *Dora the Explorer*, and *Blue’s Clues*) have positive effects on children’s learning, but other shows (like *Teletubbies* or *Barney & Friends*) do not. In general, it’s best to choose age-appropriate programs in which:

- television characters occasionally speak directly to children and
- television characters ask children to participate in the show in some way (e.g., repeating a word).

Children’s shows with a strong storyline and storybook structure (beginning, middle, end) are also good choices.

What You Can Do:

Talk about the program. Ask 2- and 3-year-olds what they thought the show was about, which characters they liked and disliked, how it made them feel.

Answer children’s questions. Children are still figuring out new ideas and concepts. Sometimes they need your help to make sense of what they’re seeing on the screen.

Point out and name things they see on the screen.

Be active while you watch. Dance to the music, hop around like the bunnies on the show, and so forth.

Connect what children see on TV to children’s “real lives.” “Do you remember we watched a show about a mail carrier this morning? Here comes our mail carrier! Do you want to watch her deliver our mail?”

When the show is over, turn off the TV and act out the story. Use puppets to tell the story, or make up your own story to act out together.

Finally, do not use television shows or videos to put children to sleep. This makes it more difficult for them to learn to fall asleep on their own. Also, young children need the love, safety, and security that comes from naptime routines (story, back rub, song) shared with you.