



# Be Tech Wise With Toddler!

Creating a Healthy Technology Environment for Your Toddler (Ages 1 to 3)

It's a busy and exciting time! Your toddler is picking up new words quickly, developing their personality, and learning by observing the world around them and testing boundaries. This is all part of their healthy development.



You boost your toddler's brain, communication, and social/emotional development through everyday interactions: **talking, reading, and playing together**. Setting healthy screen time boundaries allows more time for these important activities.



From birth to age 3, your child's brain grows most rapidly. More than one million neural connections form in their brain every second. You build their brain when your toddler tries to communicate with you—and you respond back in a way that meets their needs.

## Help Your Toddler Thrive

Talking, reading, and playing with your toddler helps:

- Further grow your strong and loving bond.
- Boost their vocabularies and language abilities.
- Prepare them for friendships and preschool.
- Build the foundation for reading and writing skills.



## What does your toddler need to grow their brains, build their spoken language skills, and develop relationships?

**Nurturing, warm, and responsive adults.** Watch for, and name, a child's feelings ("I can see you're upset") to build trust, social skills, and healthy relationships.

**Lots of language from people around them.** Your child will go from saying first words (around 12 months) to putting words together (by 18–24 months) to speaking in sentences before you know it. They learn to talk by listening to you! Older siblings are great language teachers, too.

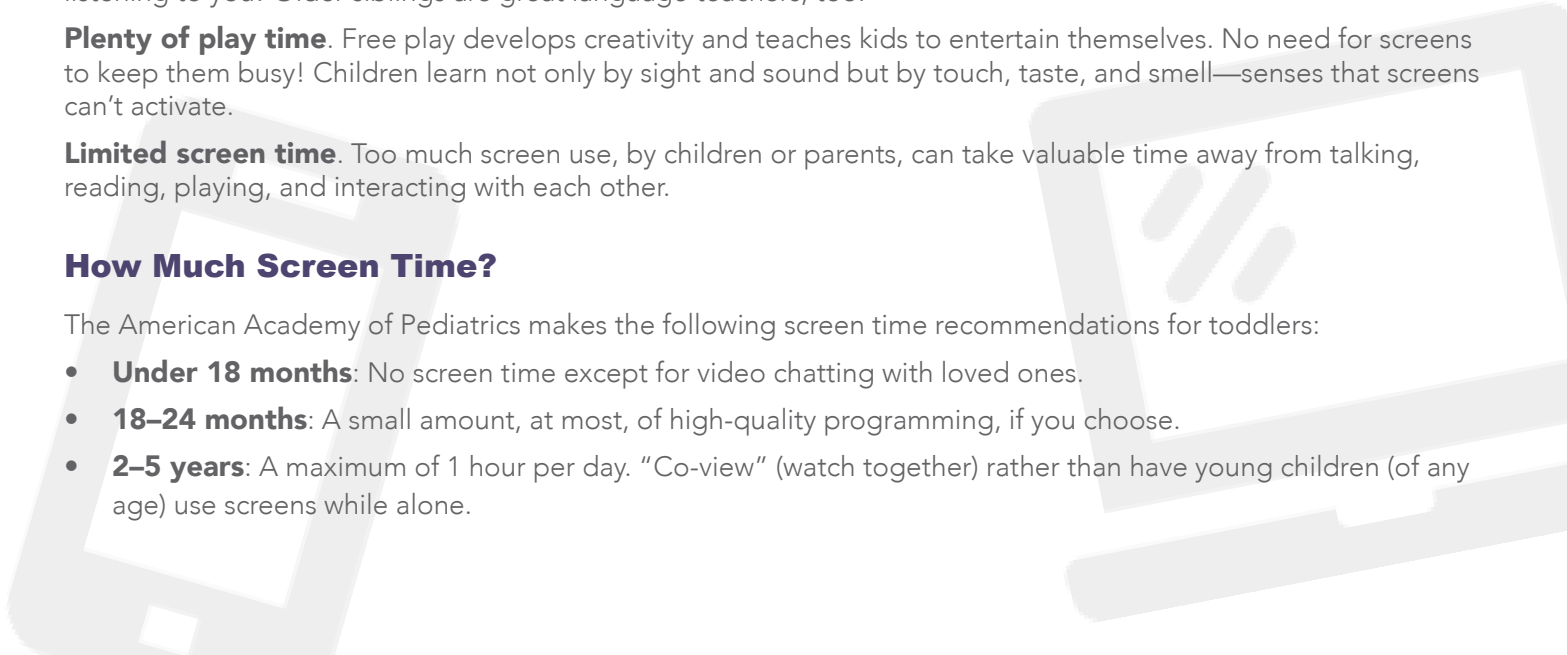
**Plenty of play time.** Free play develops creativity and teaches kids to entertain themselves. No need for screens to keep them busy! Children learn not only by sight and sound but by touch, taste, and smell—senses that screens can't activate.

**Limited screen time.** Too much screen use, by children or parents, can take valuable time away from talking, reading, playing, and interacting with each other.

## How Much Screen Time?

The American Academy of Pediatrics makes the following screen time recommendations for toddlers:

- **Under 18 months:** No screen time except for video chatting with loved ones.
- **18–24 months:** A small amount, at most, of high-quality programming, if you choose.
- **2–5 years:** A maximum of 1 hour per day. "Co-view" (watch together) rather than have young children (of any age) use screens while alone.



## Screens and Toddlers: What Parents Should Know

The use of screens can interrupt your toddler's healthy development. Here's why screen-free time is important:

- Too much screen time can **delay speech and language development**. Studies show that higher screen use is associated with poorer language skills in toddlers. This can lead to later learning challenges.
- Children make sense of their world by experiencing words and concepts in *real life*. When they learn a new word on a screen, they **don't fully understand the word** until they see, hold, feel, smell, and/or taste it.
- Screens **limit the imagination** because they provide only a set number of choices, driven by corporate interests. In a child's brain, the possibilities are endless.
- When we give toddlers screens to distract them from being upset, this can make it **harder for them to learn how to express their feelings** in a healthy way and manage their emotions.
- When we hand toddlers a screen to keep them occupied, they **miss out on developing important social and behavioral skills**—how to play by themselves, comfort themselves, and learn to wait and be patient.

### A Healthy Technology Environment: Use These Tips to Help Your Toddler Thrive

- **Keep the TV off as your toddler plays.** Studies have shown that parents and caregivers speak fewer words when the TV is on—even in the background.
- **Provide "old-fashioned" toys.** Blocks, balls, cars, dolls, puzzles, and even household items (e.g., boxes, pots/pans) are best. And remember: Loving adults are the best "toys!"
- **Minimize multi-tasking.** If you are speaking to your toddler, put your phone down to allow yourself to make eye contact and listen fully—even if for just a moment.
- **Talk to your childcare provider about screen time.** Do they keep the TV on? Use other electronics during the day? Tell them your preference for limited to no screens.
- **Turn to your pediatrician, speech-language pathologist, and other trusted experts** for guidance about screen-time use. You aren't alone in trying to find balance.



#### The takeaway on screens:

Zero screen time for your toddler is best—but not always realistic. What's most important is that you do your best to achieve a healthy balance.

For more information about your toddler's communication development, visit [www.IdentifytheSigns.org](http://www.IdentifytheSigns.org). For more about children's screen time, visit [www.screentimenetwork.org](http://www.screentimenetwork.org).