

## Screen-Based Media and Your Child's Development

### What Is Screen Time, and Why Does It Matter?



The term “screen time” refers to any time spent watching television or on an iPad, tablet, computer or smartphone. Although using these devices has become a part of daily life for most families, research has shown that excessive screen time may lead to cognitive, language, social or emotional delays; as well as reduced attention span, poor eating habits and behavioral issues.

The pediatric health care community recommends the following screen time guidelines based on a child's age:

- **18 months and younger:** Avoid using screen-based media, with the exception of video chatting.
- **18 to 24 months:** Begin to introduce high-quality – age-appropriate and education-based – content to watch with a parent or caregiver. Children under 2 years old cannot learn from media in the same way they do from social interaction, so engaging with your child during screen time is important.
- **2 to 5 years:** Limit screen time to an hour each day with high-quality programming, and maintain co-viewing practices.
- **6 years and older:** Apply consistent limits on the time spent with media and the type of content. Caregivers should also ensure media use does not interfere with a child's sleep, physical activity or other healthy behaviors, and should encourage media-free family time and media-free areas of the home.



# Meant to Move: Family Health and Wellness Education

## How Parents' Screen Time Can Affect Children

Parents' own media use and even having a television on in the background can interrupt bonding and play time with their children, and can influence kids' perception of what qualifies as appropriate screen time. Plus, screen time can have negative effects on adults' physical and mental health, too. Try setting screen time limits for yourself, especially when you are with your children, and consider activities such as the following:



- Reading a book
- Playing with bubbles, stuffed animals, board games or open-ended toys that encourage creativity and independent thinking, such as blocks
- Spending time outdoors
- Engaging in a physical activity, such as taking a walk or practicing yoga
- Playing peek-a-boo
- Building a fort or an obstacle course from household items

Research\* indicates that preschool-age children who consume media within the recommended guidelines have more advanced brain composition, which supports whole body function and development, than peers who consume excessive amounts.

*\*Hutton JS, Dudley J, Horowitz-Kraus T, Dewitt T, Holland SK. Associations Between Screen-Based Media Use and Brain White Matter Integrity in Preschool-Aged Children. JAMA Pediatrics. 2020;174(1).*

## Developmental Services Locations

Rady Children's Health Services  
3665 Kearny Villa Rd., Suite 300  
San Diego, CA 92123  
858-966-8100

Murrieta Medical Plaza  
25170 Hancock Ave., Suite 275  
Murrieta, CA 92562  
858-966-8300

Escondido  
625 West Citracado Pkwy.  
Escondido, CA 92025  
858-966-8100

Oceanside North Coastal Center  
3605 Vista Way, Suite 201  
Oceanside, CA 92056  
858-966-8100

Torrey Hills  
11752 El Camino Real, Suite 100  
San Diego, CA 92130  
858-966-8100