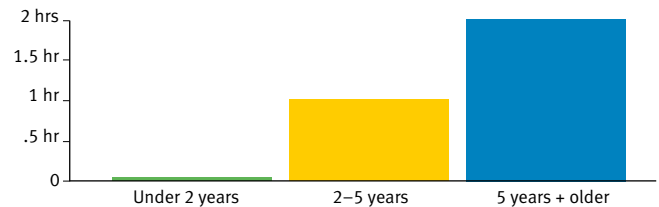




# Screen time and children

For children, television and DVDs, and other electronic devices, are a window to the wider world. They take in messages about lifestyles and behaviour that influence their development in good and bad ways.



## How TV affects children

### Babies and toddlers

The first two years are important for brain development. Babies learn and grow best by talking and playing with real people, not screen people. Using TV for companionship, distraction or to promote sleep can become a habit in later life.

### Kindy-age children

Screen images start to become more interesting to children at this age. However, lifetime habits are formed in the kindy years. Children under six have difficulty understanding the difference between fantasy and reality. They can see cartoon characters as real and they are open to the appeal of advertising. They do not follow plots.

### School-age children

Children aged six to nine years have some difficulty understanding the difference between fantasy and reality, especially if it looks like real life. They can believe that TV situations depict real families or real places. They tend to admire and want to be like their TV hero or heroine.

## How much screen time for children?

Screen time is the time you spend watching TV or DVDs, using the computer, playing video or hand-held computer games, and using a mobile phone.

- Under two years – no screen time is the best choice.
- Two to five years – no more than one hour a day.
- Five and older – no more than two hours a day.

## What not to watch

When choosing screen material for your baby or toddler, avoid:

- programs and DVDs not specifically designed for young children
- scary visual images and/or music
- advertising, because babies can recognise logos and link them with exciting colours and happy sounds but do not understand that advertisements are designed to sell things.

When choosing screen material for your kindy-age child, avoid:

- scary or sad visual images
- violent content
- scary fantasy images, including supernatural elements and characters that are dangerous or monstrous
- advertising, because they do not understand advertisements are designed to sell things.

When choosing screen material for your school-age child, avoid:

- scary images, because this age group might still be upset by material showing the death of a parent or threats to children and animals
- violent content, because they might imitate that behaviour if they see characters successfully using violence to get what they want

- news programs, because reports of natural disasters and violent crimes, especially in familiar settings, can make them feel unsafe
- advertising, because they believe messages that tell them certain products will help them be popular and successful
- music video programs, because these can affect the way children feel about themselves and sexual development.

## How to manage screen time

Children who develop healthy screen-time habits are likely to make better choices about how to use their free time when they are older.

- Set guidelines according to the age of your child by using TV classifications as a guide.
- Help your children choose some favourite programs to watch or games to play with you in the family spaces, out of their bedroom.
- Lead by example and limit your own screen time.
- Keep meal times TV-free so there is time to talk. This also helps your child learn about socialising and table manners.
- Avoid screen time in the mornings.
- Make a rule that programs are not switched on until homework or chores are done.
- Set a bedtime based on the age of your child, rather than around the program schedule.
- Monitor how long your child spends on the computer and be aware of what websites they visit.

## How to use screen time

Young children, especially toddlers, will enjoy programs and DVDs more if you watch with them. Talk with your child about what they are seeing, for example:

- explain what's happening
- respond to their reactions
- point out when characters behave in good and not-so-good ways
- give them a chance to ask questions
- let them know what you think, especially about the news, to help them understand the world around them
- if your child becomes distressed, talk calmly about it, give them a hug and follow up with a pleasant activity
- help them understand advertising and consider avoiding TV advertisements.

Watching TV together might also give you ideas for other activities, for example, you could follow a program on animals with a trip to the zoo.

## When the screen is off

Make sure you have other activities and toys to entertain and stimulate your child so they don't rely on screen material, for example:

- a special box of games, puzzles, colouring books or toys; the toys need not be expensive or fancy, just things your child does not see all the time
- music or story CDs. Kindy-age children are old enough to make up dance moves or to turn the pages when they hear the bell or signal on a story CD.



## More information

The Queensland Government provides families with up-to-date information about approved early childhood education and care services in their local area, and has parent tip sheets on a range of topics.

To access the latest information or to find an early childhood education and care service call 13 QGOV\* (13 74 68) or visit [www.earlychildhood.qld.gov.au](http://www.earlychildhood.qld.gov.au).

For service ratings visit the MyChild website at [www.mychild.gov.au](http://www.mychild.gov.au) or the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) website at [www.acecqa.gov.au](http://www.acecqa.gov.au).

### Other languages

If you need an interpreter, phone 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

### Assistance making a call

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment:

- TTY users phone 133 677\*, then ask for 13 74 68\*.
- Speak-and-listen users should phone 1300 555 727\*, then ask for 13 74 68\*
- Internet relay users should connect to the National Relay Service at [www.iprelay.com.au/call/index.aspx](http://www.iprelay.com.au/call/index.aspx) then ask for 13 74 68\*.

### Acknowledgement

The information in this publication was sourced from the Raising Children Network at [www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

### Disclaimer

This publication is offered as a guide and should not be considered an exhaustive statement on the subject.

\*Calls from mobile phones are charged at applicable rates.