

# Child Health Notes

Promoting early identification and partnerships between families, primary health care providers & the community.

Distributed by: Spokane Regional Health District - Children with Special Health Care Needs Program. Contributors: Washington State Department of Health and University of Washington - Center on Human Development and Disability. Spokane Child Health Notes online: [www.srhd.org/chn](http://www.srhd.org/chn)



## Why does screen-time matter?

- ◆ Language skills are best fostered through reading and active participation in conversation.
- ◆ Excessive screen-time leaves less time for other activities, including playing, reading, socializing with other children, and getting physical exercise.
- ◆ It leaves less time for homework and sleep, which can affect school performance.
- ◆ Children are exposed to violence, sexuality and portrayals of alcohol and other substance use.
- ◆ Children who watch violence on TV are more likely to display aggressive behavior.
- ◆ Young children don't know the difference between programs and commercials.

## Television & Screen Time: Recommendations for Providers and Parents

Young people spend more time using media – TV, movies, music, computers, Internet, cell phones, magazines, and video games—than engaging in any other single activity except sleep. In addition, DVDs marketed for infants and toddlers, such as the “Baby Einstein” series, imply that they will increase a baby’s vocabulary. However, a recent study found that longer daily duration of media exposure at 6 months of age predicted lower cognitive development and language development at 14 months. (Tomopoulos et al. 2010) Another study found no evidence that children learned words specifically highlighted in a DVD and that earlier exposure was related to lower scores on a measure of general vocabulary knowledge. (Richert et al. 2010)

Medical providers can educate families in their practice about what we know about media exposure and how to limit their children’s time in front of a screen. It is especially important to share this information with parents of children with special health care needs. Babies below the age of 2 will not benefit from “educational” videos. Older children need a balanced approach to screen time. All children, with or without special needs, learn best from interaction, play and conversation not from television and video.

### Infants and Toddlers: Parents should focus on encouraging these three activities:

- ◆ **Interacting with people** - This includes activities like talking, playing, singing, and reading with parents, siblings, and other children.
- ◆ **Handling objects in their physical environment** - This includes activities like playing with mud, splashing in water, and picking up cereal.
- ◆ **Solving open-ended problems** - This includes activities like building with blocks, trying on shoes, and sorting and stacking toys and other objects.

Television does not foster this interactive play, but there are a number of well-designed educational programs for children of this age. Some examples are Sesame Street, Blue’s Clues, or Dora the Explorer. Computers, like television, do not offer the chance for true interaction. Although there are many products that offer educational computer games for young children, there is very little research evidence to show that these products are beneficial for learning. From Center on Media and Child Health

### School-Age Children (6-10 years): It is important to encourage development in these areas:

- ◆ **Reading and Math Skills** - Parents can help their children learn about letters and numbers by immersing them in an environment where print is important.
- ◆ **Social Skills** - School age children continue to develop skills like cooperation, following instructions, and making friends. Sports teams or scout groups can foster these skills.
- ◆ **Physical Activity** - It is important for children of this age group to master control of their bodies by using their major muscle groups to run and jump and play. It is also important that they learn to control their fine motor movements for tasks like writing.
- ◆ **Problem solving skills** - Parents can encourage reason and logic by asking open-ended questions like “Why do you think that happened?” or “What do you think will happen if...”

At this age, children are very vulnerable to suggestion. Seeing violence, alcohol, tobacco, and sexual behavior in the media can be harmful. Parents also need to monitor how much time their children spend in front of the screen. Since children of this age group are now in school, they understand the concept of weekdays versus weekends. This is the ideal time to establish time limits for media.

## What is screen-time?

Screen-time includes television, computer and video games. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends:

- ◆ Children younger than two: No screen media
- ◆ Children over two: Two hours or less per day

## What can parents do?

- ◆ For one week, keep track of all screen time for each member of the family.
- ◆ Decide what counts and what doesn't. Some families don't limit emails to extended family or doing homework, for example, but do track time on social network sites, watching online videos or playing video games.
- ◆ Set a screen time budget, including TV, movies and computer.
- ◆ Keep TVs, computers and video game consoles in family areas. It is harder to monitor the content of what children are watching, as well as the time spent, when they are in their bedrooms. Studies have also shown that a TV in the bedroom correlates with less sleep and more viewing.
- ◆ Technology can help. There are devices available to limit TV viewing and computer time to schedules set by parents.
- ◆ View programs and discuss the content with children:
  - ◆ Is this real or pretend?
  - ◆ Is this how we do things at home?
  - ◆ What do you think would happen if you did that?
  - ◆ Use controversial programming to initiate discussions about family values, violence, sexuality, and drugs.

### References:

- ◆ Zimmerman et al., Associations between media viewing and language development in children under age 2 years. *J Pediatr.* 2007;151(4):364-368.
- ◆ Christakis et al. Audible television and decreased adult words, infant vocalizations, and conversational turns. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2009;163(6):554-558.
- ◆ Richert et al., Word Learning From Baby Videos *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2010;164(5):432-437
- ◆ Tomopoulos et al., Infant Media Exposure and Toddler Development *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2010;164(12):1105-1111
- ◆ Vandewater et al., Digital childhood: electronic media and technology use among infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. *Pediatrics.* 2007;119(5):e1006-e1015. doi:10.1542/peds.2006-1804.
- ◆ Zimmerman et al., Children's television viewing and cognitive outcomes: a longitudinal analysis of national data. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2005; 159(7):619-625.
- ◆ Schmidt et al., Television viewing in infancy and child cognition at 3 years of age in a US cohort. *Pediatrics.* 2009; 123(3):e370-e375. doi:10.1542/peds.2008-3221.

## Screen Time Resources

**Active Bodies Active Minds** • <http://depts.washington.edu/tvhealth/>

**Center on Media & Child Health** • <http://www.cmch.tv/>

**Children and Media** • <http://www.pbs.org/parents/childrenandmedia/>

**Media Education: What Parents Can Do** • <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/default.aspx>

**SafetyNet** • <http://safetynet.aap.org/>

**American Academy of Pediatrics, Healthy Children and Media** • [www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media](http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media)

### Local Resources:

City of Spokane Parks and Recreation. [www.spokaneparks.org](http://www.spokaneparks.org) . . . . . 509-625-6200

Infant Toddler Network, Spokane Regional Health District (for children, birth to 3 years old) . . . . . 509-324-1651

Children with Special Health Care Needs, Spokane Regional Health District (for children of any age) . . . . . 509-324-1697

### National/Internet Resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics . . . . . [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

AAP Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics . . . . . [www.dbpeds.org](http://www.dbpeds.org)

American Academy of Family Physicians . . . . . [www.aafp.org](http://www.aafp.org)

CDC Act Early . . . . . [www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html)

Family Village (Extensive family resources for CSHCN) . . . . . [www.familyvillage.wisc.edu](http://www.familyvillage.wisc.edu)

Family Voices (Links to national and state family support networks) . . . . . [www.familyvoices.org](http://www.familyvoices.org)



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