

Teach your kids to use media in healthy ways

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(HealthDay)—Some pediatric health experts may have loosened the reins a bit on "screen time" for the youngest of children, but that doesn't mean parents should rely on electronic devices as babysitters, one

pediatrician says.

"Most of us use media every day. It's how we interact with the world and it's how we learn new ideas," said Dr. Sara Lee, who's with University Hospitals Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital in Cleveland.

"Children will need to know how to use these forms in healthy, effective ways," Lee said in a hospital news release. New guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) "give parents a lot more guidance on how to use media with their kids at home," she added.

In the new screen-time guidelines for [children](#), the AAP admitted there are notable benefits associated with educational shows or apps, and connecting with friends and loved ones online, Lee said.

The academy now recommends the following:

- Toddlers younger than 18 months old should avoid screen media entirely unless they are video-chatting with relatives.
- Parents of children aged 18 months to 24 months should watch educational shows and apps with their kids. These resources can be used as tools to help children learn.
- Young children between 2 and 5 years of age should get no more than one hour of screen time each day. Parents should interact with [young children](#) while they are watching a show or using a device.
- Children 6 and older should be monitored while using electronic devices. Parents should ensure that [screen time](#) doesn't affect children's sleep, or their social and physical activities.
- Certain times of day and locations in the home should be designated as "media-free" zones. All electronic devices should be off or not used in these areas.
- Parents should have an ongoing dialogue with their children

about online citizenship and safety.

"One of the main points of the new recommendations is the importance of watching these programs and apps together," said Lee. "I think that reflects a lot of what parents were already doing. Now they can do it without feeling like they are doing something wrong."

While these rules affect children's use of [electronic devices](#), Lee pointed out that parents' habits also matter. Children look to their parents as an example of how to behave, she explained.

"I encourage parents to examine their own media use," Lee said. "Are you following your own rules about screen-free meals or screen-free times? Screens in your bedroom at night may not be beneficial to you either."

It's also important for [parents](#) to keep track of time spent online or in front of a screen. It may help to download apps with timers that will automatically turn media off or block social [media](#) sites after a certain amount of time, she suggested.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more about [children and media](#).

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