

# Pediatricians debate whether tots should have access to electronic devices

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When the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) published its policy statement in 1999 discouraging electronic media use by children under 2, the focus was on television programs, videos and DVDs.

Over the past 15 years, the technology landscape has changed dramatically. Toddlers now have access to a dizzying array of touchscreen devices that are available anywhere and everywhere. Although the AAP has revised its media use policy over the years based on the latest research, the message regarding [toddlers'](#) exposure to screens is the same.

Given the proliferation of [electronic devices](#), is it time for the AAP's advice to go the way of the VCR?

Two pediatricians will square off on the use of touchscreens by young children during a point-counterpoint session at the AAP National Conference & Exhibition. Titled "Are Tablets APP-propos for Toddlers?" the debate will be held from 4-5 p.m. Monday, Oct. 13 in Room 30 ABC of the San Diego Convention Center.

Dimitri Christakis, MD, MPH, FAAP, will take the pro side while Donald Shifrin, MD, FAAP, will take the con position. Yet both members of the AAP Council on Communication and Media agree that hard and fast rules are a hard sell.

Dr. Christakis said touchscreens are merely a platform. If a toddler

watches a movie on an iPad, it's no different than watching a movie on a DVD player. However, tablets also can be used to read books to children, and high-quality apps are similar to toys. Therefore, the AAP needs to consider how these devices are used instead of discouraging their use across the board.

"We don't want to risk appearing so out of touch that we're irrelevant and people won't take our advice seriously," Dr. Christakis said.

Dr. Shifrin, however, worries that if parents believe mobile device apps are educational, they may adopt a "more is better" mentality.

"The most dangerous thing we can do for youngsters nowadays is to deny them access to the digital world," Dr. Shifrin said, "but the second most dangerous thing is to give them unlimited access."

**More information:** The AAP policy statement Children, Adolescents, and the Media is available at [pediatrics.aappublications.org ...  
tent/132/5/958.full](http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/132/5/958.full)

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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