

## UNL For Families

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April 24, 2017

### Screen Time: Create Your Family Plan

Back in “my day”, screen time wasn’t an issue. The only screen to look at was the television and that was reserved for special programs and specific times. We called other people on a telephone that was attached to the wall by a cord. We wrote letters using paper and pen. We played games with the family, and children played outdoors in all types of weather and didn’t come inside until dark.



These days, children spend much time looking at a computer screen for school work, communicating with friends (and family), asking Siri and Google questions, and finding information on Wikipedia.org.

What does all of this mean for families in 2017? This past October, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released new recommendations and resources for families regarding screen time. Screen time includes activities done in front of a screen, such as using an app on your phone or watching music videos on a tablet.

Infant and toddler’s brains are growing at an exceptional rate during the first two years of life. It is critical for these children to have positive social interactions with the people caring for them. Therefore, the AAP recommends children younger than 18 months participate with screens only for video chatting. For children 18 months to 24 months only high quality programming (such as PBS or Sesame Street) is suggested. It is vitally important for an adult to be with the infant during the video chat and while watching the program to help them better understand what they are seeing and hearing. Research also shows that unstructured playtime is more valuable for a young child’s developing brain than electronic media. Young children are more likely to remember doing an activity than watching an activity be done.

Children ages 2 to 5 years should be limited to 1 hour of screen time per day. Again, the programs watched should be of high-quality, and be viewed with parents. For children 6 years and older, screen time should not interfere with time spent doing other activities. Sleep, physical activities, and mealtimes should be of top priority. Studies show a relationship between television viewing and young children being overweight.



What does this mean for adults? It means that we need to be good role models for our children. Put the phone down and play with your child when they are at the park. Make it a rule to turn off the T.V. during meal times. Silence phones and charge them outside of your child’s bedroom at night.

To help families navigate the evolving digital world, the AAP has developed a guide for creating a family plan for screen time and media use. The plan is broken up into 9 areas: screen free zones, screen free

times, device curfew, choose & diversify your media, balancing on-line and off-line time, manners matter, digital citizenship, safety first, and sleep & exercise. Create your own family plan by going to <http://www.healthychildren.org>. There are examples and suggestions pre-populated and areas to write in personal guidelines and to help guide you in making your plan. Delight in the company of your family, and treasure every moment.

To learn more about improving screen time and healthy children, the following publications can be found at at <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs> -

Nebraska Extension NebGuide “Brain Development and Learning in the Primary Years” (G2198)

“The Importance of Outdoor Experiences in the Primary Years” (G2202)

Nebraska Extension NebGuide “Enjoyable Time Together: A Journey of Happy Memories” (G1882)