

Screen time guidance for under 5s

Campaign Communications Toolkit

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This communications toolkit contains information to help you promote the new early years screen time guidance for parents. It includes an overview of the guidance itself, key messages and suggest long and short form copy.

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GUIDANCE OVERVIEW

On Friday 27 March, the government published new, evidence-informed guidance to help parents and carers of children under 5 navigate screen time.

Digital screens are now a normal part of family life. The early years are however critical for development – 90% of a child’s brain development occurs by age 5, making it a critical period for the development of social, emotional and cognitive skills.

The advice is informed by recommendations from an expert panel and has also been developed with parents. It is designed to provide practical, clear and straightforward advice to help families make informed choices that support their child’s development during the years that matter most.

The advice is available on the [Best Start in Life website](#). The full expert panel independent report, which this advice is informed by is available on [GOV.UK](#).

CONTEXT

Screens are part of most children’s daily lives, with nearly, 98% of two-year-olds watching television, videos or other digital content on a screen on a typical day. The early years are however a critical period of rapid brain development and there is some evidence that screen use may have a negative impact on a child’s health and cognitive and socio-emotional development.

The Government commissioned a review because it recognises the need to balance the embracing of technology with promoting the health and development of younger children.

In January 2026, the Early Years Screen Time Advisory Group (EYSTAG) was established by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to review the currently available evidence on early years screen time and to inform new Government guidance on screen time for children aged under five.

Professor Russell Viner, a paediatrician and expert in children’s health, and Dame Rachel de Souza, the Children’s Commissioner for England, co-chaired a group of experts, supported by a secretariat from DfE and DHSC.

The full report is therefore a summary of the evidence the panel collected and reviewed. It also includes recommendations to government for guidance to parents but is not guidance in and of itself. The parent facing advice, hosted on the Best Start in Life website, is informed by this report alongside direct engagement with parents.

KEY MESSAGES

Primary messages

- Some of the key recommendations for parents include:
 - Avoid screen time for under 2s and for 2-5 years, try to keep it to no more than an hour a day.
 - Choose slow-paced, predictable content as this is better for young brains. Fast-paced, over-stimulating social media-style videos may affect how young children learn to concentrate, so it's best to avoid them.
 - Avoid young children using screens alone as it reduces opportunities for social time and active play. Try watching and discussing content together with your child as it supports their development and helps you protect them from harmful content.
 - Swap out screens at bedtime or mealtimes for reading stories or playing simple games.
 - Children copy everything you do – their brains are like sponges. Be mindful of how often you use screens around your child.
 - The full advice is available for parents to access on the Best Start in Life website, alongside a whole range of other free resources and advice on everything from pregnancy to starting school.

Secondary messages

- Screens are part of modern life – nearly 98% of two-year-olds watch them every day.
- There are of course benefits to screens, but the first five years of a child's life are critical for their development, and evidence shows that for some, screens are getting in the way.
- A report from Kindred Squared found that one in four children starting reception cannot use a book properly, with some attempting to "swipe" or tap pages.
- And this is a global issue – with countries like Sweden, France and Australia all giving parents guidelines on screen time for their little ones.
- The new clear, non-judgemental and practical advice is for every parent juggling family life and navigating the challenges of raising children in the digital world.

- This isn't about telling anyone how to parent. Parents know their children best, and this guidance was developed so they can feel more informed and confident in the choices they're already making.

LONG FORM COPY (326 words)

The government has published new, evidence-informed guidance to help parents and carers of children under 5 navigate screen time. With digital screens now a normal part of family life, this guidance offers practical advice to support informed choices to help little brains develop healthy screen habits.

The guidance recommends:

- For under 2s – avoid screen time, other than shared activities like video calls with family or looking through photos together. For 2–5s: try to keep it to no more than 1 hour a day – less if you can.
- Choose slow-paced, predictable content with simple stories, fewer scene changes and characters who speak clearly. Avoid fast-paced, social media-style videos – these may affect a child's ability to concentrate.
- Children copy everything you do so try to limit your screen use around your child.
- Keep bedrooms and mealtimes screen-free. Try to swap screens before bed for a bedtime story and avoid screens for the hour before sleep as they can disrupt rest.
- Try not to let young children use screens alone – watching together means you can chat about what you're seeing and spot anything inappropriate.
- The key is making sure screens don't replace sleep, physical activity, play or quality time with you.

90% of brain growth happens before the age of 5. The interactions children have in these early years – the chats, the games, the stories, the back-and-forth conversations – lay the foundations for language, problem-solving, emotional understanding and self-control.

Large amounts of screen time has been linked to negative effects on social, emotional and language development, as well as sleep, eyesight and healthy weight. However, the good news is that small, simple swaps can make a big difference.

For more advice on how to help little brains to develop healthy screen habits visit the Best Start in Life website.

SHORT FORM COPY (167 words)

The government has published new, evidence-informed guidance to help parents of under 5s navigate screen time, offering practical advice to support informed choices to help little brains develop healthy screen habits.

For babies and toddlers under 2, avoid screens, except for shared family activities that encourage bonding and interaction. For 2–5s, try to keep it to no more than an hour a day – less where possible. Choose slow-paced content with simple stories and clear speech, as fast-paced, over-stimulating social media-style videos may affect how young children learn to concentrate, so it's best to avoid them.

Keep mealtimes and bedrooms screen-free, and try swapping screens for reading, play, and conversation. Young children copy your habits, so try to limit your own screen use around them. An important point to remember is that screens shouldn't replace a young children's sleep, physical activity, play or quality time.

For more advice on how to help little brains to develop healthy screen habits visit the Best Start in Life website.