

Alternatives to Screen Time For Children 2 to 5 Years of Age



Today's children are living and growing in a digital world. It's more important than ever to make good choices about your family's screen viewing.

The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends "no more than 1 hour of good quality screen time per day for children 2 to 5 years of age." Screen time can add up quickly in a day.



What parents can do to manage screen time:

1. Make meals, bedtime, bedrooms and vehicles screen free zones.
2. Teach your child ways to calm down or settle for bed without a screen.
3. Limit your own screen time when you're with children.
4. Try to find educational shows/games for your child. Most children's games, movies and shows are entertainment only.
5. Limit fantasy or violent games.
6. Make rules about how much screen time is allowed, when it's allowed and where it happens in your home. Tell your child what the rules are.

Screen smart activities and alternatives to screen time for preschool children.

When doing chores, including meal prep:

- Keep a few favorite board books nearby, a familiar story can be calming.
- Get a simple seek and find book. Spend time with your child looking for the things that are hidden in the picture. Set your child up with the book near you and ask them to find the animals that you saw. Keep talking to them while they are looking.
- Keep simple puzzles, coloring supplies or toys in a basket in the kitchen area.
- Ask your child to help with simple tasks in the kitchen, washing vegetables, counting ingredients, stirring and measuring.
- Play search and find in your house! Ask your child to find a silver spoon, a newspaper, a red coffee cup, etc. Have them bring the items to you. For older children, encourage thinking skills; find the toy that goes "moo", where do we keep foods cold, what do we need when we have a spill?



- Record the show, as soon as the episode is finished or the child is done watching, turn it off. This way YOU control how much they watch.
- Put some items in a container and keep it in the kitchen for before-supper quiet play. Pipe cleaners, beads, small containers to open, a clothespin and some cotton balls. Put the cotton balls into the containers using the clothespin to pick them up. Make a bracelet with the beads and pipe cleaners.
- Set up a safe stool at the kitchen sink and put in a small amount of water and bubbles. Give your child some small plastic containers or dishes to “wash”.

When waiting for an appointment or at a restaurant:

- Take a set of blocks or dominoes, build together.
- Keep a bag packed with “sitting still” toys. A small whiteboard to draw on, a favorite book, some plastic building blocks or pipe cleaners.
- Get a simple joke book and teach your child how to tell jokes while you wait.
- Borrow a search and find book from the library. Work together to find and count the different items in the book.
- Use Video Chats to connect with friends or family. Plan a tea party or story time with them.
- Use your phone or device to learn something new with your child; where is the rain forest or what do Panda Bears eat? (Remember to count this in daily screen time amounts)



In the car:

- Download some music that you both like. A strong beat and rhythm can be distracting or classical or nature sounds for calming.
- Download a children’s audio book and listen to it together.
- Make a photo book of special people and activities in your child’s life. Keep it in the car.
- Keep special toys and books for the car. Put them in a bag that your child can reach.
 - Tell a story about when you were a child, the things you liked to do, your favorite activity, etc. Then ask your child to tell you a story about themselves.
 - Look for signs and logos out the window that your child might recognize, can you find the big yellow “M”?
 - Count different things you see out the window, trucks, cows or birds; “who can find the next one?”



Visit The Foothills Children’s Wellness Network www.foothillsnetwork.ca to learn more about member agencies who can provide information and support in making good screen choices for your family or email FCWN.coordinator@ahs.ca to connect with a real live person.