

Digital Media in Early Childhood



An educational guide to media use for families with children aged 2 to 6 years old

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Digital media (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones, televisions) have become an integral part of our everyday lives. Many children have their first exposure to digital media at a very young age^{1,2,3}. This brings both opportunities and risks. This is why it is essential that children learn how to use digital media competently and safely right from the start. All caregivers are the most important role models for a child^{4,5}.

This responsibility often presents families with major challenges⁶. This guide is intended to provide you with some pointers as to how these challenges can be met from an educational point of view:

What needs to be considered when using digital media with children?

- Use digital media together with your child.
 - This allows you to pay attention to your child's reactions, such as fear or joy.
 - Content or activities that interest, stir up or unsettle the child can be discussed with the child immediately^{7,8}.
 - It is sometimes difficult for young children to transfer what they see into their own real world, or to differentiate what they see from that world. Children need the support of their caregivers here, for example, in the reenactment of the content or activities which are viewed and by varying them according to their own wishes. Interesting and instructive content and activities can be viewed several times^{9,10,11}. This enables children to grasp details.
If the content or activity depicts a documentary about an elephant, for example, you could then help the child to build or paint an ideal environment for all their fabric and wooden animals using natural materials and blocks.
- Content or activities that are suitable for children of this age must be non-violent and not particularly loud, and the imagery should not be too stimulating either.
- Ideally, the content or activities should come from the child's everyday life (familiar objects, characters, stories, etc.)¹⁰.
- This makes it easier for them to connect the content to their own world. Conversely, stories can also be actively recorded and, for example, integrated into a joint role-play^{12,13}.
- The child should be familiar with the characters that appear on digital media¹⁴.

When should digital media be avoided?

- Media is not suitable for use as a distraction or a babysitter, and should only be used together with adults. If, however, the child does use digital media alone for a short time, this should be for a maximum of ten minutes. In such cases, child protection settings should be used, especially for internet-enabled devices, so that only child-friendly content or activities are available^{15,16}.
Audio media for listening to stories or music (e.g., the Toniebox) can be used by children alone for a limited time. However, the caregivers should know the content of the story.
- Digital media should not be used in the following situations:
 - When eating together
 - When playing together
 - When changing nappies or in other care situations
 - While talking to the child
- Frequent media use can affect sleep duration and quality.
We therefore recommend:
 - not using screen media in the evening^{17,18,19}. Audio media for listening to stories or listening to music, on the other hand, can certainly be used²⁰.
 - not placing any digital media with screens (smartphones, tablets, laptops, televisions) in the child's room^{17,18,21}.
 - only using digital media for a short time – no longer than one hour per day in total^{22,23,24}.

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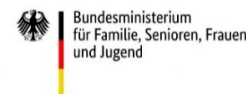
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