



FIRST YEAR AT SCHOOL

TECHNOLOGIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN AT HOME

‘Information and communications technology’ (ICT) includes traditional appliances such as televisions, computers and digital cameras as well as newer devices, such as smart phones and iPads, webcam recorders, tablets and e-readers. These digital, interactive tools have changed how we communicate with each other and how we access information. ‘Programs and applications’ (apps) relevant to young children include interactive books, games, streamed video services, puzzles and digital play spaces where children can follow or create scenarios.

When carefully chosen and monitored, ICT can support children’s development and learning in language, creativity and problem solving.

Choosing technologies

When adults join children as they explore and use technologies, it maximises the learning value and minimises risk.

A university study in Sheffield and Edinburgh suggested that when parents and educators (TAP, 2015) are choosing programs and apps for young children they should look for ones that:

- foster collaboration with peers or adults
- are open-ended, focusing on the process rather than the product
- invite the child to explore possibilities and experiment with ideas
- encourage physical activity around the app—singing, dancing and playing with a real toy
- support prediction and solving real-world problems
- give verbal instructions rather than directions in writing
- foster fun with letters and words embedded in meaningful tasks, not rote learning and repetition
- develop independent reading through highlighting words the narrator says, or which ask questions to focus the child on the meaning of a story

- genuinely give the child decision-making power, rather than send them in one, predetermined direction
- provide encouraging feedback about what the player has done correctly
- have content that helps children to connect with others in a safe digital environment.

Advice for parents

- Talk with your child about the appropriate use of technologies from the time they begin to show interest. We want to foster habits and attitudes such as: courtesy and respect for other people; self-awareness and self-discipline; safety and privacy in relation to themselves and their family.
- Remember that older children, within your family or in other families, influence younger children’s experiences. This means you need to be clear about and explain your own values and the behaviours that are acceptable.
- Model the behaviour you wish to see in your child. Limit your own use of technology when your child needs your attention, check that it does not intrude into other activities such as shared time, walks, meal times and conversations. Show how you are using it wisely—e.g. not talking on a mobile phone while driving.
- Reach agreement with older children about which technologies are allowed, where and for how long per day, or per week.
- Help children to become discerning and critical about what they see on screens, talking with them about stereotypes and negative behaviours and about the ‘sell’ aspect of promotions.
- Show children how to use technologies creatively, such as making family photo albums and videos to share with distant friends.
- Engage with the digital world yourself. Learn with your child; sharing their world and asking about their favourite tech tools will help you understand what they mean for the child. Try different apps and programs to communicate with people in different ways. Have fun!

Summary

Young children grow up in a world where digital technologies and interactive screens—smart phones, web cams, tablets and applications (apps)—are all around them. It's important for parents to choose technologies for young children with care, to keep an eye on how they're using them, and to work and play collaboratively with them in this 'cyberspace' environment.



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