



# Tech for Tots

## Why did ConnectSafely publish this guide?

Sixty-one percent of parents say that parenting is more difficult than it was 20 years ago, with many citing technology as the reason why, according to a 2020 Pew Research Center survey. Teaching even our youngest children how to use devices and interact with digital content in a healthy way has become an important part of parenting.

## When should I allow my child to use technology?

As you read through this guide, remember that you know your child best. Not all children are the same when it comes to technology and media preferences and habits. Some can self-regulate from a young age. Others get anxious or are quick to temper if they spend a lot of time with screens. Some have special needs, which may require more supervision or the use of filters and monitoring software even when they have reached an age when most children no longer need those restrictions.

## What does the research say?

The research tells us that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are interacting with devices every day and some are even spending hours each day with screens. According to a [2020 Pew Research study](#), 64% of parents of children 3-4 said that, as far as they know, their child has interacted with a tablet. Nearly the same number (62%) said they have interacted with a smartphone, while 90% had watched TV by

## Should I just “ban” screens?

There have been many TV segments and articles claiming that even the most tech-savvy parents are banning screens and media in their homes. The reality is that very few have an all-out ban. They mostly have clear expectations about when media consumption is acceptable and when it should be set aside. Strict zero-tolerance rules are not always best, but consistency, balance, and structure are important.

that age. A significant percentage of children under 2 had used technology, with 49% having interacted with a smartphone, 35% with a tablet and 74% with a TV.

## Any advice for talking to kids about this?

We can't overemphasize the importance of keeping in close touch with your children about their use of media. That includes not only talking about what apps they use but how they are using them and what they are doing. Make it a conversation, never a lecture. They will feel more comfortable coming to you if something goes wrong.

## Devices & young children

The American Academy of Pediatrics has published guidelines – but they are just that. Only you know your child’s maturity level and the benefit they would gain from using a particular technology.

### Up to 18 months

Not much access to devices at all, with the exception of video chats with family members and friends.

### 18 to 24 months

Parents should co-view high-quality content with their kids so that the media experience is social and children can talk about what they are seeing and doing. Experts say adult interaction with the child during media use at this age is crucial.

### 2 to 5 years

Parents should continue to co-view when possible or at least be nearby and should keep screen time to about an hour a day of high-quality programming.

### 6 to 10 years

AAP guidelines are less specific, but they emphasize that families should talk about the media they consume or interact with and be consistent about how they use and limit the use of technology and media.

## Types of screen time

Active screen time is valued over passive screen time. Active screen time includes video chats, educational games, or games that require players to work together. Passive screen time includes watching TV or online videos, scrolling through social media or photos, and playing simple games.

## Do as I do

It is important for parents to model the ability to self-regulate by unplugging when they first arrive home from work, at dinner, and when driving. Also, parents should model methods of relaxation and entertainment that do not involve screens: take a walk, have a talk, play a game, dance and sing to music or just relax without staring at a screen.

## When should I give my child a smartphone?

Although there may be some exceptions, we don’t recommend that children under 8 have their own smartphone. There may be times when it’s appropriate for them to use phones owned by other family members or their own basic feature phone, but not necessarily an internet-connected pocket-sized device. There are many families who wait until their children are 12 or 13 to give them a smartphone.

Smart safety and wellness tips for kids using smartphones (this advice also applies to tablets):

- Disable the ability to download apps and make in-app purchases without parental permission.
- Utilize device-specific tools to manage when and how long the device can be used.
- Disable both cellular data and Wi-Fi if you want your child to have access to a game without the ability to go online.
- Employ devices’ “do not disturb” feature that lets users turn off notifications while still allowing calls from designated people to minimize disruptions.
- If you do give a smartphone or tablet to a young child, consider turning off mobile data and Wi-Fi access.