

# Children and Screen Time



A Summary from the  
Santa Clara County  
Office of Education

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great deal of activity in the brain. But when the toddler is watching someone they know or even someone they don't know on a webcam during a video chat, "there's a whole lot of brain activity going on," Brown said. "What we learn is that we as humans are very much social beasts and we are really learning by engaging with other humans and so the more that a digital technology can approximate that, the more a young child can get out of it," Brown said.<sup>5</sup>

"Media is just another environment and parents just need to know that they're going to use the same rules in this different environment," said Brown. "And so you would sit down in the real world and play with your child, you would pretend and have a tea party. Well the same rules apply. You don't just park your kid in front of a screen and make them go play by themselves. If you sit down and play with them on that screen, on that technology, they're going to get more out of it."

Brown also said parents need to do their homework when it comes to finding apps for their children. There are thousands of apps that are listed as educational, but there is little research validating their quality. "There's a lot more to education than swiping and pointing and that does not make an educational app," she said. The doctors' group recommends parents look to other organizations that focus on curating and rating content for children, including Common Sense Media.

For older kids, "What we're really wanting to put out there is that life balance is important and everything in moderation and so yeah, you do want to keep an eye on how much time your child is spending in front of a screen, just as you want to keep an eye on how much they're doing something else," Brown said. "You want to make sure that they have a balance to their life."

It's also important to know when to turn the screens off. "There's a time and place that's appropriate and you want to have tech-free zones," she said, which could include the family dinner table and moving laptops, tablets and phones out of children's bedrooms overnight.

The quality of content your child engages in is also more important than the platform or the time they spend with it, writes Brown, so parents are advised to prioritize how their children spend their time rather than just setting a time limit. The overall message, said Brown, is that while technology keeps changing, parenting has not: The importance of setting limits, teaching kindness and being involved won't change based on the latest app children are using.

### **Recommendations for Parents**

The Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) supports the following key messages being promoted by the AAP prior to the official release of their recommendations in October 2016.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2015/10/06/health/screen-time-rules-change-pediatricians/index.html>

- ***Media is just another environment.*** Children do the same things they have always done, only virtually. Like any environment, media can have positive and negative effects.
- ***Parenting has not changed.*** The same parenting rules apply to your children's real

- **Create *tech-free zones*.** Preserve





**U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):**

“There is no scientific evidence that provides a definite answer to that question. Some organizations recommend caution in cell phone use. More research is needed before we know if using cell phones causes health effects.”<sup>18</sup>

**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):**

“Scientific opinions vary regarding risks associated with radiofrequency (RF) radiation exposure from cell phone use. While some studies have shown a correlation between the occurrence of certain adverse health effects and long-term use, a definitive cause and effect relationship has not been established.”<sup>19</sup>

**World Health Organization (WHO):**

In 2011, the WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified radiofrequency electromagnetic fields (RF-EMF) as a possible carcinogen. The classification was based on limited evidence of a link between RF-EMF and glioma, a type of brain tumor. The WHO also noted that there is no consistent evidence of a link between RF-EMF and other types of cancer.