Monthly Message: The Research on Screen Time

screen time: *n.* 1. Time spent watching a device (TV, computer, tablet, smart phone)

Ten years ago, the iPhone didn't exist and Facebook was only for college students. Today, technology has boomed and is weaved into daily family routines like checking the weather on smartphones or reading a bedtime ebook. When it comes to exposing young children to technology, it can be fuzzy whether it is helping or hurting their development. Without much scientific evidence on the topic of screen time, opinions mostly guide families decisions about its use in the home. Thankfully, new research is beginning to answer common questions families have about screen time.

Screen time is not "bad." Consider it like cake. Kids may enjoy it but caregivers are mindful of when to offer it and how often. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends *avoiding screen time for children under 2 and limiting screen time to 2 hours a day for children 2 and older*. The guideline exists because research shows children learn best through experiences in the real, physical world. This allows children to have plenty of back and forth adult interactions and exploration experiences like touch and taste. While children can learn from watching something on a screen, until a child is 2 years old, their brains have a hard time transfering that knowledge into real life. Also, it takes more repetitions to learn an activity on screen versus in person. Limiting screen time ensures children have enough time for physical activity to reduce the chance of childhood obesity.

You can, however, turn screen time into a more positive experience for your child. Research shows that making it a "shared" experience allows learning to take place. Viewing age appropriate content with your child offers a nurturing and emotional element while talking about what you are viewing makes it a language-rich experience. Take a look at the following tips from Zero to Three to help enhance your child's future screen time.

{ did you know? }
Smartphones are the most frequently used device among children 8 years old and younger.

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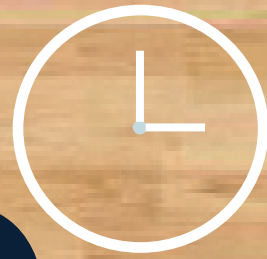
TIPS FOR SCREEN TIME 📺

- View content together. Talk about what you are watching, ask questions or take turns while playing games.

- Act out what you are viewing. For example, if a kangaroo is hopping on TV, stand up and hop too.

- Make connections between what your child sees and real life. Ex. "Remember how Charlie tried a new food from the market? Would you like to try this kiwi?"

- Avoid leaving the TV on in the background when you are not watching. It distracts children from play and reduces parent-child interactions.

- Avoid media before bedtime. It makes it harder for children to fall asleep.

- Choose educational programs where the characters ocassionally speak directly to children and ask them to participate in some way. Shows with strong storylines that are not fast-paced are recommended. (Ex. Arthur, Dora the Explorer, Sesame Street)

- Limit *your* screen time and mobile use when children are present. Kids are drawn to whatever adults in their lives are interested in.

- Focus on the story and less on the interactive features.

To learn more about the research on screen time, visit

www.zerotothree.org/parenting-resources/screen-sense