Smart Choices with Screen Time

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We live in an exciting fast-paced world of technology and stimulation. How do we balance all of this for our young children and make smart choices for their development? The best answer to this question is threefold: limit screen time to the appropriate amount by age; make sure that screen time is interactive and that you co-view with your children; and choose movies, shows, and apps that are not overstimulating and help them learn.

Screen Time Amounts by Age

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following in regards to screen time amounts for children.

- For children younger than 18 months, avoid use of screen media other than video-chatting.

- Parents of children 18 to 24 months of age who want to introduce digital media should choose high-quality programming and watch it with their children to help them understand what they're seeing.

- For children ages 2 to 5 years, limit screen use to 1 hour per day of high-quality programs or app play. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.

Use Media to Build Connection

Watching shows or using app content with your children is important because it ensures you know what your child is being exposed to and allows you to monitor the content based on your family preferences. Additionally, and of great importance for development, many research studies have found that for a child to make educational or developmental gains with screen time, it needs to

happen with an older teen or adult who can talk about, explain, and share the content with the child.

In early intervention, we strongly encourage families to sit together and connect when using media and screen time. Here are some ideas on what you can do with your family:

- Act out what is happening on screen with toys or your body
  - Pause the show to point out and name people, animals, or objects.
    - Use gestures and make fun sounds along with the show.
      - Name emotions on characters faces and talk about why they feel that way.
      - Play a game finding items around your house that match those on screen.
- Name items on the screen and have your child find them.
  - Dance and sing with songs and music.

Remember, the movie, show, or app should simply be a means to an interaction with your child which can then help them gain skills in all areas of development. If connection is not happening with media use, it is time to evaluate and make changes for your child.

Choosing the Right Media for Your Child

The last piece to the puzzle is making sure you choose the right types of shows and apps for your child. Exposure to things that are fast paced, brightly colored, and full of loud and busy noises can start to teach a child's brain that they need those things on a more consistent

basis. This type of stimulation can make it more difficult for a child to play with traditional toys, be creative, entertain themselves, express their emotions well, and can impact both sleep and behaviors.

During screen time, young children should be talking, laughing, looking away periodically, pointing, playing with other toys, and asking questions. If instead they appear to be zoned out or mesmerized, there is a high chance the show is overstimulating for them.

Unfortunately, many of the most popular children's shows overstimulate and should be avoided. Things that can cause overstimulation are:

- Scenes that are 4 seconds or less and move too quickly
- Oversaturated bright colors
- Multiple sounds playing at once
- Flashing letters or objects
- Moving camera angles.

To test out the shows your child is watching use the above list and compare them to the shows listed below. The following shows offer entertainment and learning opportunities without overstimulating:

- *"If You Give A Mouse a Cookie"*
- *"Guess How Much I Love You"*
- *"The Snow Day"*
- *"Bug Diaries"*
- *"Elinor Wonders Why"*
- *"Stella and Sam"*

Navigating screen time can be tricky, but using the three areas of focus found in this article can help you make the most of it for your child. Remember to limit based on age, use it for connection, and choose media that is not overstimulating your child.