

# LEARNING TO GROW

CENTER ON THE FAMILY ♥ UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

## How Young is Too Young: Using Technology Responsibly

There has been an explosion of software games, videos and educational programs aimed at young children, including babies, all claiming to be tools for learning and fun, and encouraging more electronic media use and more “screen time” for children at an early age. But, how young is too young for a child to use a smart phone, laptop, tablet, or even watch TV/DVDs? While these may seem like good ways to keep a child occupied, **the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) discourages any amount of screen media and screen time for children 2 or younger and recommends no more than one to two hours of total screen time per day for children older than 2.**

Your child’s brain begins developing within a couple of weeks of conception. While she is born with most of the brain cells she will need to function, it is the experiences that your child has in her early years that help to finish her brain’s development. What she experiences through her senses—hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, and smelling—become the building blocks of her brain’s development, and the quality of most of these experiences are dependent on you and other trusted adults who care for her.



This month’s newsletter will focus on recommendations for responsible use of electronic media in supporting your child’s healthy development. Information for infants and toddlers is combined based on the AAP’s recommendation regarding screen time. In addition, some suggestions of age-appropriate activities and materials are provided.

### In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child’s healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ Age-specific information and suggestions about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ Featured activities for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child’s development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

# Infants and Toddlers

The first two years of your child's life are a critical time for her brain development. During this time, responsive interactions between you and your child are essential to her early brain development, affecting her physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. While there may be appropriate uses of technology for very young children in some limited contexts (e.g., viewing digital photos, participating in Skype interactions with loved ones, and reading e-books together), **research has not found any educational value for children of this age to have any screen time** (exposure to electronic media).

Why is “no screen time” for infants and toddlers recommended? Very young children learn best by relating to real people, moving around, and interacting with their surroundings. A child is more likely to engage in higher level interactive play—exploring, experimenting, and interacting and learning with others when there are no electronic media distractions (TV, tablets, etc.).

Media exposure is a reality for many families in today's society, but you can choose concrete strategies to manage it.



It may take some rethinking of how to change to your routines to limit screen time for your child. Here are some ideas for alternative ways to engage your child in age-appropriate activities.

- ♥ Instead of using electronic media to distract or occupy your child, talk with your child and engage her during everyday routines. Changing a diaper, bathing, eating, even running errands, can all become ‘teachable moments’ if you engage in conversations with her. Have fun and enjoy the time you have

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## Activity for Infants: *Alert Attention*

Materials: None

What to Do:

1. When your baby is awake, pay attention to her as much as possible.
2. Talk to her about the objects and activities around her.
3. Smile at her often and respond to her smiles.
4. Cuddle her and gently stroke her face, arms, and legs.
5. Hold her so you are facing each other.
6. Kiss or blow three or four quick kisses on your baby's tummy. Exaggerate your movements by shaking your head as you blow on her tummy with your lips.
7. Encourage other family members to talk and play with her.
8. Respond to her cries with a gentle voice. Don't let your baby cry it out. Crying is her way of communicating; your response lets her know you hear her and care.



*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*

with her, watching and listening to her reactions and responses.

- ♥ Engage your child in active movement. Allow your baby to move around and reach for objects or spend some time on

her stomach. Also, do activities inside and outside—dance, imitate how animals move, or walk to the mailbox together and count how many steps it takes to get there.

## Activity for Toddlers: Valentine’s Card and Rhyme

Materials:

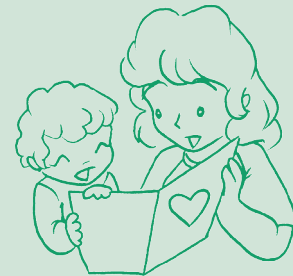
Paper

Washable markers or jumbo crayons

What to Do:

1. Fold a blank sheet of paper in half.
2. Draw a heart on the outside of the card and write “I love you!” on the inside.
3. Give it to your child and read what you wrote.
4. Next, say this rhyme together about Valentine’s Day while you count together with your fingers.

*Let’s count valentines, one, two, three  
Let’s count valentines, all for me!  
Let’s count valentines, four, five, six.  
Let’s count valentines, match and mix!  
Let’s count valentines, seven, eight, nine.  
Let’s count valentines, I’m glad you’re mine!*



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)

## Activity for Preschoolers: Counting Hearts

Materials:

Paper

Washable markers or jumbo crayons

What to Do:

1. Have your child draw hearts on each of the cards or pieces of paper, with each piece having a different number of hearts 1–8.
2. Write the number representing the number of hearts on each card.
3. Mix up all the cards and help your child put them in numerical order. Count the number of hearts on each card with her and explain where the card should go in the sequence. Point out the written number that matches the amount of hearts on the card.
4. As your child becomes more familiar with the number sequence, lay out the cards in order and, starting with the card with one heart, ask her, “If we add one heart to this card, how many hearts will there be?” Then point to the card that has two hearts, and say, “One heart and one heart makes two hearts.” Try this with the next number.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)



# Preschoolers

It's hard to ignore electronic media in today's world; it's everywhere, and children and adults alike are attracted to the bright colors, entertaining characters, and interactive features. Given the many programs, software, and games aimed specifically at young children that claim to promote learning, and the general appeal of electronic media, it's important for parents to consciously decide how much it will be a part of their child's daily experiences. According to the National Education for the Education for Young Children, technology is a tool that can support the development and learning of preschool-aged children and older, when used in intentional and age-appropriate ways and in conjunction with other traditional tools and materials. However, electronic media should not replace activities such as creative play, real-life exploration, physical activity, outdoor experiences, conversation, and social interactions which are all important for children's development.

If you choose to engage your preschooler with electronic media, it's important to identify clear strategies to manage its use.

The following are some suggested strategies:

- ♥ Set specific limits on screen time—when and how it is to be used, and for how long. Setting a timer when your child sits down in front of a screen can help keep to time limits. Break up the screen time into smaller chunks throughout the day so your child isn't inactive for a long stretch of time. For example, allow her 15 or 20 minutes in front of the screen, and when the timer goes off, have her choose another activity.
- ♥ Be selective about the types of programs she sees/uses. Connect what she sees and experiences “on the screen” to real life experiences. When she is watching TV or playing on the computer, sit with her and talk with her about what she is seeing to turn it into an interactive learning experience. Afterwards, do an activity together that reinforces her learning. For example, after she plays a game about food, have her help you in the kitchen to make a snack.

## A Special Valentine's Day Activity: *Finding Hearts*

Materials: None

What to Do:

1. Explore outside. Ask your child to help you find heart shaped objects. If needed, show her what a heart shape is.
2. See how many heart-shaped leaves, flowers, or other objects she can find (e.g., anthurium flowers, lu'au (taro) leaves, and clover leaves. Be creative and look everywhere (clouds, draw a heart in the sand or on a piece of paper, etc.).
3. Make a list of all of the objects and ask your child to draw pictures of the different things that you found.

Variation:

Do a scavenger hunt together. Place cut out paper hearts or objects that are red or pink in one area of the house. Tell your child what she needs to look for and find, and search for them together. As she gets better at this game, hide the objects and give her clues of where to look.



# How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development.

## Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen large muscles
- ♥ Develop eye-hand coordination

## Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Learn to interact with others
- ♥ Learn to cooperate with others

## Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Develop skills needed for writing

## Cognitive Development

- ♥ Begin to learn about adding and subtracting
- ♥ Develop early math skills.



## Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons. As you do this recipe with your child, show her how to safely handle the items and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Make sure to wash your hands and your child's hands before preparing any food.

### Homemade Valentine's Pop Tarts

Adapted from: <http://blogs.babble.com/family-kitchen/2011/01/24/homemade-valentines-pop-tarts-for-your-sweetheart/>

#### Ingredients:

- 1 package of refrigerated pie crust
- Strawberry jam or any jam of your preference
- Flour

#### Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F.
2. Transfer the pie crust to a lightly floured surface. Have your child feel the dough and talk about what it looks like.
3. Cut the crust into 2"x3" rectangles.
4. Have your child scoop about 2 teaspoons of jam onto one of the rectangles, leaving about ¼" of space around the edges. Talk about what the jam looks and tastes like.
5. Together, use a small cookie cutter or paring knife to cut a heart shape (or any other shape) out of another rectangle. Place the heart shape on the side.
6. Then, place the rectangle with the heart cut out of it over the piece with the jam and seal the edges together by pressing around the edges with the tip of a fork. Talk about how you can see the jam through the heart shape.
7. Repeat the process until all rectangles are used. You can make different shapes or cut out the heart shape in different places.
8. Bake on a cookie sheet for 8 to 10 minutes and allow to cool before eating.



# Community Resources

## Fred Rogers Center

<http://www.fredrogerscenter.org/resources/database/>

Read about how to use media responsibly with your child and explore interactive activities with your child.

## Children, Youth, & Families Education and Research Network

<http://www1.cyfernet.org/hotnew/02-12-media.html>

Read about current research regarding the impact of media on young children. Scroll to the middle of the page to see information for parents.



## Suggested Books

Recommended by Read to Me International [www.readtomeintl.org](http://www.readtomeintl.org).  
For more books, visit the public library [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).



### Infants and Toddlers

#### ***Pepito the Brave*** by Scott Beck

Often, young children must learn in their own way and time. In this book, Pepito is afraid of flying, so he tries other ways to get to the new tree where his siblings are. This story shows that you don't have to engage in the most conventional approach when taking on a new task.

#### ***Noisy Nora*** by Rosemary Wells

When ignored, young children will act out. This is the case with Nora. When she feels ignored, she expresses her frustration by banging windows, slamming doors, and making a mess. In the end, Nora's family comes together as Nora makes her loudest mess yet.

### Preschoolers

#### ***Harold and the Purple Crayon*** by Crockett Johnson

A children's classic, this story follows young Harold as he creates his own story and adventure by drawing it with a purple crayon. This is a great book for preschoolers, as it allows them to use their imaginations.

#### ***Ruby in Her Own Time*** by Jonathan Emmett

Ruby is the last of her five siblings to hatch. She is also the smallest, and she eats the least. However, Father Duck and Mother Duck are not worried. They know that she will catch up with all her siblings in her own time.

Learning to Grow is a project of the Center on the Family at the University of Hawai'i, College of Tropical Agriculture & Human Resources, with funding from the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. [www.learningtogrowhawaii.org](http://www.learningtogrowhawaii.org)