

# Using Technology to Support Learning at Home

## SIMPLE TIPS FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Parents with young children are facing an unprecedented demand to support their children's learning at home—and technology can help. While there are an abundance of educational resources—online games at PBS KIDS, author readings on Instagram, live video streams from zoos—it can be bewildering to know how to begin. This tip sheet is meant to give you a strong foundation before you start your hunt for individual resources.



# Getting Started



- 1 Set expectations before you begin.** Before starting a digital activity, talk with your child about why you are using it and for how long. Changes are difficult for young children, and it can be hard to stop using something as novel and engaging as a phone or tablet. You can help by being clear from the outset, establishing media routines that make sense for your family. For example, when starting a new activity, you might explain, “We’re going to use this tablet to learn about numbers and to play some games for a little while. Then we are going to do some drawing.”
- 2 Be mindful that technology does not replace other important early childhood activities, such as spending time with others.** Technology can never replace human interaction. Children, especially young children, need caring and knowledgeable adults to help them navigate and learn about the world, which is why you are so important. Select games that can include two or more players if you or a sibling are able to join the child and play. Also, help your child practice what they learn when phones and tablets are turned off. For example, if your child is playing with shadows and light as part of a digital game, use a flashlight and explore shadows together around the house.
- 3 Use technology to expand your child’s social play and exploration.** Having conversations, sharing discoveries, and other forms of self-expression are essential for young children, especially in this time of social distancing. Encourage your child to talk about what she does while playing, or to share through drawings, screenshots, and stories of what she has done. Ask open-ended questions about what your child is watching or doing, like, “Why do you think that happened?” Encourage your child to imitate a song or repeat a new word in the video or app they are using. Likewise, children love to be the stars of their own show. Help them take advantage of cameras, painting apps, and storytelling tools to express themselves during these unpredictable times. For example, have your child tell the story of her day and record key moments with photos.
- 4 Highlight and share your family’s values.** Seek out digital books, videos, and music that your culture values so others can know about them, including your child who may be eager to know more about what is important to your family. For example, if your child enjoys singing along to a traditional family song or playing a game learned from relatives who live far away, look for related materials online. Share your family’s culture by having your child record a short video or write a story using emoticons.

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**Use digital tools to bridge physical distances between family and friends.** Technology can offer opportunities for your child to stay connected with grandparents and other family members during this period when travel and health concerns are impacting all of us. Use video chat options like Skype, Google Hangout, FaceTime, or WhatsApp Video to help your child stay in touch with loved ones. Encourage them to participate by saying things like, “Show Grandpa the drawing you made this morning,” or “Let’s take a picture of our pancake recipe and share it with your classmates, and ask them to share their favorite meals.”

## Building Positive Tech Habits



- ✓ Always use your best judgment to determine what kind of device, online resources, and routines are best for your family. Nobody knows how long school closures will last, so try to set consistent times and places to use technology at home to develop a sense of routine for your child.
- ✓ Ask your child’s teacher or school if they have recommended games and apps, which should be developmentally sensitive and aligned to children’s learning goals. Visit [commonsensemedia.org](https://commonsensemedia.org) to read expert reviews about books, TV shows, and games appropriate for children, and to get more tips about media use (like these). The site has an authentic Spanish language section.
- ✓ At home, set up a space where children can use new devices safely. For example, put them in a low area within children’s reach but away from sinks, toilets, or kitchen tables, where accidents could easily happen. Set them in open spaces where two or more people can share them. If your child must use headphones to minimize noise, remember to walk by often to make sure she isn’t accidentally using unwanted content.
- ✓ Keep chargers, headphones, mice, and cases centralized. Store them away from crowded areas, and preferably near a power outlet so you can charge them when not in use. If you’re locking them, make sure you and other caregivers know where the key goes.
- ✓ Find out the time of the day when your internet connection is stronger. There’s no doubt that the new demand for home learning will affect connectivity. If you have WiFi, test your device in various locations to see where it works best. Do the same at different times of the day, and set up spaces and routines based on what you learn.

- ✓ Contact internet service providers to see what they are doing to support families during the pandemic. For example, AT&T is waiving internet data overage fees for capped users, Spectrum is offering Wi-Fi hotspots for public use, and Comcast is permanently increasing Internet speeds for all users. Most providers are waiving subscription fees for new members.
- ✓ Turn on appropriate parental controls and firewalls to prevent children from browsing unsafe websites. Look for child-friendly versions of your favorite apps, like YouTubeKids (YouTube) and SafeSearchKids (Google search). Use strong passwords for all your apps, and keep your software current, making sure you have the latest security updates.
- ✓ If you are borrowing a laptop or tablet from your school and the device breaks, do not try to fix it at home. Most schools will want you to contact them directly.
- ✓ Preview apps and games before using them. Teachers often pre-select games and apps for families, but it is still a good idea to make sure the recommended apps are appropriate. See the next section for specific guidelines, and read Common Sense Media reviews.
- ✓ If your family speaks a language other than English, see if the recommended apps offer content in your home language. Share your discoveries with teachers and families in your community who might need content in the same language.
- ✓ Use technology to stay connected to teachers during school closures. Let them know what your child is doing through texts and emails—and remember to share your child’s progress and accomplishments with them so they can celebrate with you!
- ✓ Remember to clean your technology tools. Smartphones, tablets, and computers are high-touch tools, which means they need to be wiped down before each use, now more than ever.



# What to Look For When Selecting an App



- The content reflects lessons that your child needs to practice or that are part of the curriculum.
- The design is not overly flashy. It is simple, but engaging.
- The resource is compatible with your device and affordable for your family.
- The content is free of stereotypes and is available in various languages.
- The app has ...
  - ✓ audio, visuals, and clear instructions for children who can't read well
  - ✓ a story that links the activity to a plot
  - ✓ characters that speak directly to children or respond to children's actions
  - ✓ opportunities to learn from trial and error and to solve problems
  - ✓ feedback that motivates children as they play—for example, by unlocking new content or giving hints when children select a wrong answer
  - ✓ prompts for children to be creative and connect the lessons to the real world
  - ✓ the possibility to interact face-to-face with other people you know
  - ✓ a difficulty level that adjusts itself based on performance.



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This resource was developed by **EDC's Center for Children and Technology**, which has been exploring the roles that technology can play in the lives of young people since 1980.

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