



Screen Time for Under 5s

The UK government has issued **national guidance on screen time for children under five**. Evidence shows that too much solo screen use can affect language, sleep, social skills and healthy weight — but not all screen use is equal. Small changes make a big difference.

Age by Age Guidance

0-2

Avoid screen time

Babies & very young children

Avoid screens other than for shared activities that encourage **bonding, interaction and conversation**, such as a video call with grandparents. These early interactions build the foundations for language and social development.

Max 1 hour per day

2-5

Toddlers & pre-schoolers

Try to keep it to **no more than one hour a day — less is possible**. Choose slow-paced, age-appropriate content. Avoid fast-paced social media-style videos and AI toys or tools.

Why This Matters

- **98% of 2-year-olds** in the UK watch screens every day. Children with the highest screen time show a measurable impact on **language development**.
- Long solo screen time can get in the way of **sleep, physical activity, creative play** and **parental interaction** - all critical for healthy development.
- Reading together, simple games, play and back-and-forth conversations build **language, problem-solving skills, self-control** and social understanding from birth.
- How parents use their own devices also matters - **children learn from watching us**. Modelling healthy screen habits is just as important as setting limits.

Key Rules to Follow

AVOID: Screens at mealtimes. Meals are a vital opportunity for conversation, turn-taking and language development.

AVOID: Screens in the hour before bedtime. Screen use can disrupt sleep - which is critical for young children's health and brain development.

AVOID: Fast-paced or social media-style videos and AI toys or tools designed for young children.

DO: Watch together and talk. Co-viewing - where a parent or carer watches and asks questions about the content - is linked to better cognitive development than solo screen use.

SEND exception: Time limits may not apply in the same way for screen-based assistive technology used by children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Screen Swap Ideas

Bedtime

Read a bedtime story together

Builds vocabulary, imagination and a calming routine before sleep.

Mealtimes

Play 'I Spy' or simple table games

Background music, colouring or conversation all work too.

Keeping in touch

Video calls with family

This counts as a shared, bonding activity — great for all ages.

After nursery

Creative or physical play

Play, drawing and movement support language, self-control and problem-solving.

Remember: It's not about eliminating screens - it's about balance, boundaries and being present. The goal is healthy habits, not perfection.