

# The Grandparent Guide: Screen Sense

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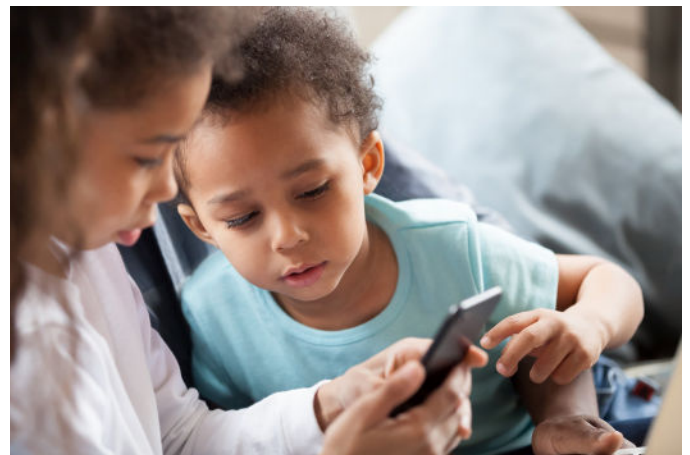


**ZERO TO THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime

Let's talk about kids' use of screens. It's a big topic in many households, and one of those most likely to cause disagreements between generations!

If you're a grandparent, you probably remember debates about too much screen time from your own childhood. Back then, the conversation was about TV, and parents wanted to know if watching was helpful or harmful.

The debate continues today, with more devices added to the mix. Our tablets and phones are often the first thing grown-ups look at when we wake up, and the last thing we look at before we go to sleep. It's not surprising that the little kids in our care want to do what we do.



## How much screen time is OK for little kids?

Here's what you need to know:

- **There's no substitute for you.** Children learn best through play in the real world and back-and-forth conversations with the people who care for them. They know you'll take the time to explore the things they're most interested in. And there's no app that comes close to learning about the world from the person they love.
- **Video chat is the best screen time there is.** Video chat is fine—even for babies—because the far-away person can respond to the child as they might if they were nearby.

Here's how to make it fun:

- **Be social.** Try rhymes, songs, dancing, finger plays, and games like peek-a-boo and hide-and-seek.
- **Use props** like puppets and stuffed animals to play together through the screen.

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**For babies up to 18 months of age, it's best to avoid other screen media. TV is distracting to little ones and can interrupt their learning, even when it's on in the background.**

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- **Ages 18 months – 5 years.** One hour a day of good-for-kids screen content is okay. (You can find high-quality shows, games, and apps at [PBS Parents](#) and [Common Sense Media](#).) Togetherness is what makes watching meaningful. Talk about what you're seeing on the screen with your toddler. Compare what's happening on the screen with what happens in real life. Sing along with the show's theme song.
- **Be a good role model.** DO turn your phone off while you spend time with children. DO make mealtimes media-free. Talk with your grandchild about the different foods on the plate (like their tastes, shapes, and colors), what happened that day, and what you see out the window. DO remove phones and screens before naptime and bedtime. Use the time before lights-out to snuggle together and share stories and lullabies.



**Research Says:**

Turn off the television, including children's entertainment shows, when children are playing, when no one is watching, and during daily routines like mealtime. Background television has negative impacts on young children's learning.

For more FAQs, see [zerotothree.org/screensense](http://zerotothree.org/screensense).

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Your attention is a great gift to your grandchildren, as well as to their parents who are trusting you with their care. ZERO TO THREE has [lots more ideas](#) on reading and playing together, no screens required. And be sure to check out our other materials created especially for grandparents at [zerotothree.org/grandparents](http://zerotothree.org/grandparents).