



Setting screen-time limits -- and helping kids moderate their own habits -- are all about finding the right balance for your family's needs and lifestyle. We offer advice for creating a **realistic schedule**, setting **age-appropriate guidelines on TV time**, finding the **first websites for young kids to use**, handling **violent media**, and managing **kids' cell phone use**.

Popular Questions for Little Kids (5-7 yrs)

Will my children be behind their peers if they aren't already using tablets and computers?

Most likely, no. The ability to use technology competently is not a skill, such as learning letters and numbers, that builds a foundation for the rest of your child's academic career. **Kids who have a solid academic base**, exposure to a rich variety of experiences -- including the use of digital tools and other social and intellectual activities -- likely will pick up digital skills fast once they start using them.

Some kids might experience temporary social limitations, such as not being able to talk about and play the latest video game with friends. Also, they might not be in tune when technology is introduced in the classroom (which is happening at a fast rate).

Generally, though, the risk of being "left behind" lies with kids who have other challenges, such as being low income or at risk due to home or community situations. If these kids are not exposed to technology, there is a risk of adding a handicap and increasing the **digital divide that already exists between higher- and lower-income groups**.

Are there any helpful tips for turning off the TV without causing a meltdown?

Helping kids regulate their own media use is an ongoing process, and along the way you're likely to experience some struggles when it's time to turn off the TV or any other digital device. When it's time to transition from TV watching to another activity, using prerecorded shows comes in handy. On traditional broadcast TV, one show flows into another, but when you use the DVR, a DVD, or even a streaming-video service, your kid can turn off the TV when the show is over.

To mitigate the meltdowns, try these things:

Have a plan. Explain beforehand to your kid that he or she can watch one show. If you're feeling energetic, plan an activity for right after it ends.

Show your kids how to turn off the TV. They may enjoy practicing that skill, and it will give them some power over their situation, which they'll appreciate.

Give a five-minute warning. Transitions are hard for kids, and anything you can do to ease them along, while also making sure your requests are reasonable and respectful (for example, you're not turning off the TV right before the show's climax), will help.

What are some good websites that are safe for my kid to explore?

Sites featuring characters that kids already like are good places to start. But be careful: Many of these (**Nick Jr.**, **Cartoon Network**, **Disney**) can be really commercial. For 5- to 7-year-olds, we like **Poptropica**, **FunBrain**, and **PBS's wide selection of offerings**. You also can follow up on kid's interests -- from trains and dinosaurs to princesses -- to keep them connected to what they enjoy offline.

The key is to look for age-appropriate content that really engages your child. For preschoolers, **interactive activities with an educational bent** should offer practice with letters and numbers, drawing, story-making, shape recognition, silly songs, and rhymes. If your kids aren't reading yet, look for sites that feature audio prompts. For kids practicing fine motor skills, sites with big buttons are good.

Age 7 is about when kids might start exploring **virtual worlds**. These are closed environments that offer a wide variety of games and activities, as well as social features such as chatting and making a friends list. Virtual worlds typically can be played in for free but offer more features when you buy a subscription.

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