RAISING LITTLE ONES IN A SCREEN WORLD

SIMPLE, PRACTICAL ADVICE
FOR PARENTS OF 0-2 YEAR OLDS

BY DR KRISTY GOODWIN

Dr Kristy

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About Dr Kristy

Dr Kristy Goodwin is a digital parenting educator (and mum who's endured her own kids' techno-tantrums!). She's a speaker, researcher, media commentator and the author of *Raising Your Child in a Digital World*. Kristy takes the guesswork and guilt out of parenting young children in a screen-saturated world. She has a gift for translating research into practical and digestible information for parents, educators and health professionals about how plugged-in childhoods and adolescence are shaping today's kids. She arms parents and professionals with facts, not fears, about the impact of 'digitalised childhoods' on children (without telling parents to digitally amputate their kids by banning the iPad, or unplugging the TV). Kristy's on a mission to bust the myths and misinformation about young kids and screens by giving parents and professionals simple information and practical tips for raising balanced and healthy kids in the digital world.

To find out more about Dr Kristy click here.

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Section 1 - Brain Basics

Your baby's brain in the early years- what parents need to know (essential neuroscience for parents and carers)

Typical brain development is determined by the combination of your child's genes and the experiences they encounter. In the first three years of life brain development is predominantly focused on the: (i) sensory and (ii) motor regions of the brain (the posterior brain). This is why babies and toddlers move a lot (and why we shouldn't expect them to sit still in a cafe!), why they touch things and put things in their mouths. The posterior part of the brain is considered a primal part of the brain, because it was responsible for our human evolution and allowed us to survive. (For example, it's where your baby's orienting response originates. This explains why they startle when they hear a loud noise, or turn their head to watch the TV – their attention is alerting them to a change in their environment and their senses are heightened. The orienting response helps to keep them safe.)

Over the next three to four years, with the right types of experiences, typical brain development shifts from the primal region to the prefrontal cortex (this part of the brain is located behind the front of the skull). This is the part of the brain where higher-order thinking skills like impulse control, working memory and mental flexibility are developed. The prefrontal cortex is sometimes referred to as the CEO or air-traffic control system as this is where executive-function skills are recruited. This part of the brain doesn't fully develop until the early twenties for females and late twenties for males (yes, this parenting gig is a long-term contract!).

This progressive and predictable pattern of development of the brain is one reason why some health professionals and educators are concerned about the potential impact that the early introduction of screens might have on a child's development. In particular, there are concerns that our noisy, busy digital world may adversely impact our children's attention and overstimulate the sensory region of the brain before the prefrontal cortex has adequately developed and can cope with this type of constant stimulation.

There are also mounting concerns that a screen-saturated childhood will also result in an underdeveloped motor region of the brain, as kids aren't having as many opportunities to explore how their bodies work and be physically active. In addition, our little ones are often experiencing a sensory overload (flashing, music, animations, videos, graphics) before their brains are ready to process this type of input. There are also possible concerns (although not yet substantiated by research), that the premature introduction of screens may overload babies' and infants' nervous systems and cause a hyper-arousal state.
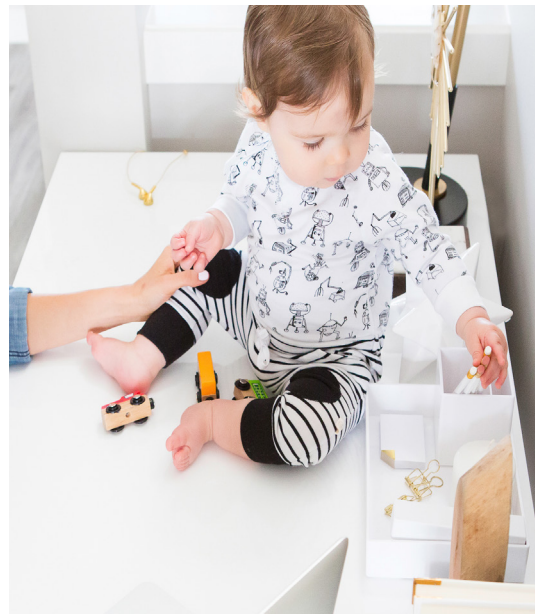
It's important to note, that we're still at the early stages of research that examines how screens and digital technologies are intersecting with children's health, learning and development. It may be difficult to obtain information about exactly how technology impacts on children's brains because of obvious ethics issues (I wouldn't let my kids be guinea pigs!). What we do have, however, is a consistent body of research from neuroscience and developmental science that tells us exactly what babies' and infants' developmental priorities are when it comes to the optimal health and development. What I'll share in this eBook is a combination of what we know from neuroscience and developmental science and the emerging evidence we have with technology research and young kids.

How might screens interfere with infants' development and health? What are the potential risks of little ones using technology?

Screens aren't necessarily toxic for little ones, but they have the potential to adversely impact a child's health and development, if:

// they're introduced too early (there's no research available yet to prove that prematurely dunking your child in the digital stream will prepare them for Harvard, so there's no rush!); or

// if they're used excessively (we'll tackle the 'how much' question later in this eBook); or

// if they're used in isolation (babies and toddlers should really spend very limited time alone with screens, as they cannot actually make meaning from a screen and need interactive, language-rich experiences for optimal development).
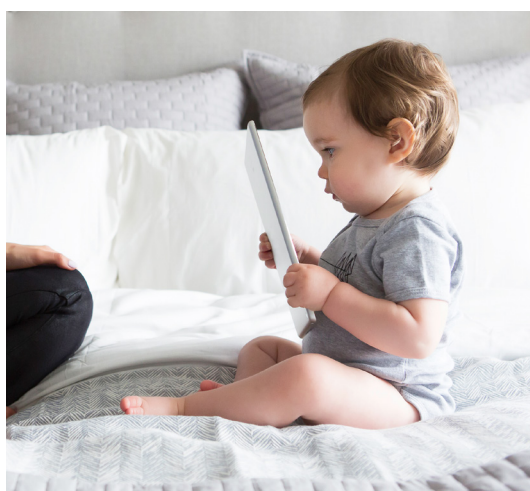
Basically, the reason we have to be careful with infants and toddlers and screens is because there's a displacement effect. There's an opportunity cost associated with screens- it displaces opportunities for a young child to engage in other activities that are essential for their development. Given that babies and toddlers have limited waking hours each day (if we're lucky and got a 'sleeper'), we need to make sure that screen-time doesn't interfere with or displace their basic developmental needs (such as physical movement, play, social interaction and language skills. Yes, their little brains are developing all of these skills!)

For example, screens can impact on children's relationships and attachments they form with their caregivers, if their caregivers are always digitally-distracted. Screens can also impact on children's sleep quality and quantity (I'll explain more about this in another section later in this eBook) and can erode opportunities for physical movement (30 minutes watching the iPad, is 30 minutes not spent crawling or exploring).

At this stage, we're conducting a bit of a living experiment in some regards. Remember, we don't yet know what they long-term risks are if our little ones are introduced to technology too soon. So as 'cautious Kristy' I suggest we go back to what we know for certain. What does the neuroscience and developmental science tells us kids definitely need for optimal health and development? Simple things- relationships, language, sleep, play, physical activities and good nutrition.

Section 2- How much screen-time is safe/healthy for 0-2 year olds?

Is any screen time okay when they're under two?

Most global recommendations regarding screen time discourage screen use with children aged under two. And this isn't necessarily because screens are 'bad' for kids or will harm your child's development per se, but it's based more on concerns of what little ones are missing out on when they're using a digital device: it's the opportunity cost, as previously mentioned.

Given that infants have limited waking hours we have to ensure that the time spent awake is put to good use. We know that approximately 85% of a child's brain development occurs in the first three years of life. So it's imperative that their basic developmental needs (like moving, using and hearing language, playing and forming relationships) are not hampered by the use of screens.

If you choose to use screens with your little one try, where possible, to use screens with them: watch TV and talk to them, flick through photos on your phone and discuss what they're looking at, read a story on the iPad together. (See the section below for more information on healthy age-appropriate screen activities for 0-2 year olds).

What's the 'right' age to introduce screens to little ones?

There's no safe or ideal age at which to introduce technology to little ones. There's absolutely no hurry to do so either, despite what the marketing claims on children's techno-toys, apps and gadgets suggest.

I advise parents to err on the side of caution. The neuroscience confirms that in the early months and years of life, young children really only need simple things: lots of exposure to language (including plenty of serve-and-return interactions with adults), combined with lots of opportunities to physically move, explore their world, build strong attachments (relationships) with parents and primary carers and see what their bodies can do. Screen time can potentially interfere with these basic developmental needs.

> "There's no rush to dunk little ones in the digital stream. There's no evidence yet to show that the early introduction of screen is beneficial. There's solid evidence about exactly what simple things babies and toddlers need for healthy development."

Have I harmed my baby or toddler if I've let them use a screen?

Now before you fret or worry that you've exposed your baby to TV or other screen time in the first two years, rest assured that a little bit of technology is unlikely to be harmful. Small amounts, of around 10-15 minutes/day is likely to be fine. I simply encourage parents to limit the time children under two years spend on screens and resist the pressure to introduce screens early in life to give your child an educational advantage (there's currently no research to substantiate this claim whatsoever at this stage).

If you want to use technology with your little one, try to use it together. Use it as a way to cement your relationship with them and immerse them in language. For example, watch videos and photos from smartphones and discuss what's observed. Chat to Grandma over Skype. Explore new words or ideas, sounds and images online. Try to connect what they're watching on DVDs and TV to their real life and experiences.

We need to make screen time a social and interactive experience with our child and ensure that time spent with screens doesn't replace or substitute time spent with us or another caregiver. We need to minimise the time that we rely on technology as a digital baby-sitter (and yes, it's okay to do this every now and then too).

Is it okay to use the TV or iPad whilst I have a shower, or go to the bathroom, or make a phone call?

In an 'ideal' world we would try to avoid using technology as an electronic babysitter. We can try to give little ones something that's age and developmentally-appropriate to do during these times- tummy time, block play, special toys etc. However, as a Mum, I know the sheer bliss that can come from an uninterrupted shower, or trip to the bathroom! And sometimes it's more of a safety consideration (your acrobatic 18 month old can do some serious harm whilst you have your 60 second shower)!

Sometimes using the iPad whilst you have a shower, or make an important call, is the only option (you've probably already tried to get your little one to play with the saucepans, or blocks).

So my advice? Avoid using screens as a babysitter where and when possible.

IF YOU NEED TO USE A SCREEN WHILST YOU DO SOMETHING ELSE:

// Do so for limited time. At this age, I suggest no more than 10-15 minutes/day. This amount of time is unlikely to cause long-term developmental concerns.

// Have very clear and consistent boundaries- let them throw the techno-tantrum when you take away the iPhone, or switch off the TV. Acknowledge their feelings and divert their attention to something else that they enjoy. If you're consistent with firm boundaries when they're young, it will pay dividends in the future.

// Select high quality, educational media (whether it's an app, or TV program look for slow-paced, repetitive, language-rich types of experiences). Use curated content sites like ABC Kids, Foxtel Kids as opposed to unmoderated sites like You Tube where your little one can see violent, scary or age-inappropriate content. The Raising Children Baby Karaoke website and app are brilliant resources with popular nursery rhymes.

// After they've watched the screen try to help your little one make meaning from what they've seen on the screen by talking about it afterwards and connecting what they watched to the real, 3D world (at this age, they're unable to make meaning from a 2D screen- they usually develop this skill between 18-30 months). This will also help to bolster their language skills too.

"Young babies and children need laps, not apps!"

Is it okay to hand over my phone at a cafe or whilst waiting at the doctor surgery?

Minimise the amount of time where technology is used as the 'digital babysitter'. Kids very quickly become accustomed to using technology *everytime* they experience boredom or frustration. Remember, it's okay for your child to be bored! They need to learn to deal with their big emotions and the only way they can do this is by experiencing,not bypassing the emotions. Emotional regulation skills are a critical life skill.

(Confession: raising my hand here to say that I've certainly been thankful that *Play School* was available to entertain my little ones from time to time, when I had an important deadline to meet, or a phone call to make. We just need to ensure that we're not always relying on screens to pacify or entertain or distract our little ones, as they'll soon form a digital dependence and always expect to be handed your smartphone, or tablet whenever they're bored, upset, frustrated etc).

Complete digital abstinence for little ones is almost impossible (and unnecessary) in this screen-saturated world in which we find ourselves. We don't need to blindfold our babies when they're near screens, nor do we need to try and completely avoid screens. If you do want to use a screen with your little one try and co-view, where possible (i.e. use the screen together as opposed to always using it as a digital pacifier), find high-quality, age-appropriate content, stick to firm limits and avoid *always* handing over the digital pacifier.

Section 3- What's appropriate and safe for 0-2 year olds to do on a screen?

At what age can little ones actually learn from technology?

The research identifies a phenomenon called the 'transfer deficit' (also referred to as a 'video deficit'). Basically, it explains that digital experiences are no substitute for hands-on experiences with infants. The video deficit is believed to persist until children are somewhere between 18 and 30 months of age (that's a huge variation!). Whilst little ones can learn from a screen, we know that young children learn *more* from hands-on experiences and interactions with real people than from screens, particularly in the first three years of life.

What sorts of things can I do with my little one and a screen and not worry that it's 'bad' for them?

Video-chat technologies like *Skype* or *FaceTime* are great as it exposes little ones to language and develops serve-and-return interactions. Also looking at photos and videos, reading book apps are other developmentally-appropriate tasks. Basically, anything that develops play and language is encouraged.

The research tells us that children typically don't make meaning from a screen until at least 18 months of age, because of a phenomenon called the 'video deficit effect'. So they need you to help them make meaning from what they see on a 2D screen and relate it to their 3D world.

Use [Common Sense Media](#) app review tool to find reviews and age-appropriate content.

Will my child fall behind if I don't let them use a touchscreen device?

Absolutely not! There's no research evidence as yet to indicate that there are educational or social advantages of introducing touchscreens to babies or toddlers. Instead, we do have a comprehensive body of research that tells us that babies and infants have predictable and simple developmental priorities. These basic developmental needs must be met each day to ensure optimal health and development (such as relationships, language, sleep, play, movement, nutrition). If touchscreens are used excessively, or prematurely, they can *potentially* derail these essential developmental priorities.

Will my little one fall behind if they're not watching educational DVDs and apps?

No! Despite the marketing hype and claims of many baby DVD products, there's no research to substantiate their claims that these devices offer any educational advantages to very young infants. In fact, in 2007 Disney, the owner of the Baby Einstein DVDs, was forced to offer a refund on their baby DVD range after the Federal Trade Commission found that their website and packaging claims were not supported by research.

Studies have found that infants and toddlers actually learn less from TV and touch screens than from live demonstrations because it's difficult for them to understand how information depicted on a screen relates to the real world. This is the 'transfer deficit'. Basically, they learn half as much and recall it for shorter periods of time. So infants, up until around 30 months of age learn best from real objects (than from screens).

Does my child need techno-toys?

There's an assumption that techno-toys, with their sophisticated and pre-programmed responses are superior to more traditional toys like wooden blocks and Lego. The marketing claims surrounding many techno-toys suggests they provide educational benefits and a head start. Despite the marketing claims that suggest that many battery-operated techno-toys promote learning, there's no evidence at this stage to confirm this claim.

Research suggests that infants don't necessarily benefit from techno-toys. Studies have shown that play with electronic toys is associated with decreased quantity and quality of language input, as compared to play with traditional toys or books.

Regardless of whether children are using traditional or digital toys we need to find toys that encourage children to think, explore, manipulate and use language. Techno-toys, because they're pre-programmed, can sometimes limit play experiences (see the section in this chapter about the potential harmful effects of techno-toys).

Susan Linn suggests applying this simple formula when selecting toys for young children:

Ideal toy = 90% child-directed + 10% toy-directed

We want children thinking and interacting with toys. We don't want the toy doing all the hard work for our child. Look for toys that promote thinking skills, problem solving or interaction.

Dr Kristy's Book

Ditch the guilt and guesswork raising young children in a digital world, Grab a copy of my book

Raising Your Child in a Digital World translates the most current research on new technologies and their impact on young kids into practical and digestible information for parents (and professionals working with families). It busts the myths, explores the benefits of time online and helps parents to successfully guide their children to balance 'screen time' with 'green time' (and alleviate their techno-guilt).

This book finally allows parents to put an end to the guesswork and guilt when it comes to raising kids in a digital world (without telling them to ban the iPad, or unplug the TV). Because digital abstinence is not the solution.

"Dr Kristy shares my concerns around the potential for harm when technology is used too much or inappropriately and in her book she has explored research and common sense to give parents an excellent guide to navigating this strange new world. She guides parents on how to make good decisions in the home while being mindful of what to be careful of at various ages and stages in terms of internet usage. She makes complex information easy to read and understand. This book needs to be in every home where our digital children aged birth to 25 live."

Maggie Dent | Author | Speaker | Parenting Educator

"Impressed by this new book which is well researched and steers carefully and in details around the hazards and harms of too much screen use by children and teens. It's not merely balanced (which can be a copout), but very specific about what to avoid and why, and is based around what children need for their age and stage."

Steve Biddulph | Author | Speaker | Parenting Educator

Now more than ever we need this book! This book gives peace of mind, that children can thrive in a digital world and stay connected to themselves and the world around them. Kristy delivers the research but more than anything she solidifies the need for play, connected relationships and getting outdoors in nature and that you don't have to give up one to have the other. She encourages that we can strike a balance and use technology to our advantage while nurturing the spirit of our child. Bravo!

Kerry Spina | Mum & Author Kids in Harmony

As a researcher in young children's technology use I'm increasingly aware that parents need more information about how to survive and thrive in this digital age. In 'unpacking' key research for parents, Dr Kristy Goodwin's work here presents a much needed resource.

Dr Kate Highfield | Macquarie University, Institute of Early Childhood

Section 4- Healthy screen habits for little ones

Are there any times I should avoid using screens with my little one?

Yes, there are specific times where parents should try and avoid screens altogether:

// Sleep and naps- the blue light emitted from smartphones and tablet can suppress your child's production of melatonin and this in turn can cause sleep delays. Avoid using screens at least 60-90 minutes before nap or sleep time. Also keep devices out of bedrooms, to avoid screens interfering with your child's sleep cycles and prevent them from waking up early to get their digital dose.

// Before and during mealtimes- screens can overload your little one's sensory and nervous systems and cause them to be hyper-aroused. As a result, this can adversely impact on their eating. Learning to eat recruits many of your child's senses (sight, taste, touch, smell) so if their sensory system is bombarded from using screens, it makes it difficult to get your little one to eat. TIP- allow your child to empty their sensory cup before mealtime, if they've used a screen. For example, if your little one watches TV whilst you make dinner, allow them five minutes to go outside and use the swing, or play with saucepans before they eat their meal. It allows their nervous and sensory systems time to calm down.

// Digital pacifier- kids need to learn emotional regulation skills (and this is a BIG task and one of the reasons why our kids have tantrums). If they're always given a digital device to avert a tantrum or to help them cope with feeling bored or frustrated, they'll quickly learn (and expect) to pacify themselves with a screen. Sometimes there are situations, where screens can be a welcomed distraction, but kids can quickly form an unhealthy digital dependence. So be mindful about always relying on the screen to help your child deal with their big emotions!

// Avoid rapid-fire, fast-paced screens before daycare- these types of high-action screen activity like fast cartoons, or TV programs can arouse the brain and cause a general hyper-aroused state.

Are screens bad for their developing eyes?

There are mounting concerns from ophthalmologists and paediatricians that the premature and/or excessive use of screens early in life can impact on children's visual development. Early exposure and increasing time spent with screens may put kids at increased risk of vision ailments. Children's screen habits place their eyes are under many stressors at earlier ages and often for increasing periods of time.

The rapid adoption of tablet and mobile devices means that babies and toddlers are spending more time with backlit devices that emit blue light.

Blue light is *potentially* harmful because it can penetrate to the back of the eye. Children's eyes are still developing and haven't yet developed the protective pigments that enable them to filter out some of the harmful blue light.

We're also worried that young children aren't spending enough time playing outdoors. Natural sunlight is essential for healthy visual development (and also helps regulate their circadian rhythms which will help them sleep). So remember, get your little one outdoors!

HEALTHY VISION TIPS

// **Limit time**- it's so important that we limit our children's time on digital devices. 10-15 minutes/day is my suggestion, if any at all.

// **Blink often**- children's eyes can quickly tire from staring at screens and can become dry. Teach them from a young age to frequently blink if they look at a screen.

// **Encourage screen-free breaks outside**- These rest periods in nature allow the eyes to reorient the focus on long distance objects and not short-distance screens and time in natural light is essential for healthy eye development.

Let me take the guesswork and guilt out of parenting young children in the digital world...

RAISING YOUR CHILD IN A DIGITAL WORLD:

FINDING A HEALTHY BALANCE OF TIME ONLINE WITHOUT TECHNO TANTRUMS AND CONFLICT

—

By Dr Kristy Goodwin

GRAB YOUR COPY HERE

Section 5- How *our* screen habits impact on our little ones

Is it okay to share pictures and/or video of my child online?

Deciding what, if any, pictures or videos you want to share of your children on social media is a personal decision for each family to make. There's no clear-cut answer, but there are definitely some things that parents need to carefully consider before deciding to share their child's images online.

As parents, we need to carefully consider the consequences, potential safety risks and (powerful) messages we're sending our kids if we archive every moment of our kids' childhoods, or their private milestones via our social media channels.

Some essential questions to ask yourself before you post any images or videos of your kids online:

// What messages are we sending our kids if we're constantly snapping and sharing snaps of them? Our kids imitate our digital habits (have you seen a baby trying to tap at any screen, or pretending to talk on the phone?) so we need to be so mindful of our digital habits.

// Are we missing the moment if we're so preoccupied with digitally capturing the moment to our camera roll?

// Are there potential safety risks if we share pictures of our kids online? Do we even know where can their images end up?

// Are we becoming the' parenting paparazzi' who snap and share huge numbers and sometimes inappropriate or insensitive pictures and videos of our kids online?

Sharing our children's images and information via social media stays with our kids into adulthood. This is their 'digital DNA'. Every photo or video has digital DNA. As parents, do we have the right to curate our kids' digital DNA? Will future employees, partners and friends want to see pictures of naked toddlers?

Many people suggest that the scaremongering around sharing photos of kids online is unnecessary. They propose that parents have long snapped pictures of kids and had photo albums filled with printed photos. What's the moral panic about social media becoming the digital replica of the family album?

Whilst there are certainly benefits of 'sharenting' (i.e. sharing images/videos of your kids online) there are also possible harmful effects, which have gone unrecognised by many parents because we've simply been swept up in this digital whirlwind.

If you do decide to post images of your little ones online (and remember, it's totally okay if that's what you and your partner decide to do) I strongly encourage parents to ask these questions:

// Permission to post

Whilst you can't ask your one year old if she's comfortable posting her wobbly walking steps on social media, you need to ensure that your partner is okay with you doing this. Many parents assume their partner feels similarly about social media but realise that their partner isn't comfortable with sharing pictures of their child on social media. Maybe you need to compromise and only share images without their faces, or only if both parents agree to post a picture/video.

Equally, if you're posting images or videos of other people's kids on social media always ask them if it's okay to post. Not everyone has the same views on social media sharing of kids.

We also need to develop the habit of asking permission to post pictures of other people's children. Many parents are outraged when they find images of their children on social media, when they've made a concerted effort to not share images of their children. So always ask permission if you're posting images of other people's children. In some instances, there may be a court order in place that prohibits the publication of children's photos online.

// Pause before you post

Kids can certainly be frustrating and embarrassing as times, but recording and then sharing those moments on social media invades their privacy and may harm your relationship with your child further down the track. I'm not suggesting that posting one funny picture of your child on Facebook will psychologically damage them, but what's the cumulative effect when they look back at their childhood and realise what was curated and shared and commented on by others?

[Glennon Doylein](#) her book *Love Warrior* suggested that we "share from your scars not your open wounds." When we post from our wounds we often regret it later on. So always ask yourself does this moment *really* need to be digitally catalogued? What are the sacred, personal and private moments that you want to savour? Does the online world really need to know about every one of your child's milestones?

// Privacy

Do you know who can see your photos or videos? Check your privacy settings on social media and check these often, as they regularly change. You can change these so you have some control over who sees your photos.

Remember that you lose full control over where your images may end up when you share them online. There's no guarantee where your child's photos might end up!

Is there anyone else in the photo? Remember, they may not want their image shared (or there may in fact be legal reasons from preventing their image from being shared). Is geo-location turned off? Online sharing of photos can sometimes reveal the location of where the photo was taken.

What are safer, or more private ways to share images of my kids with family and friends, other than social media?

Do you necessarily need to use social media to share your photos? There are other ways of sharing your photos of your kids without relying on social media. For example, [Tiny Beans](#) allows parents to share digital photos easily and privately via an app. It's been described as an online photo journal. You could also use email, a secure online portal (that is password protected and requires authorisation to access) or even use multimedia messaging (SMS or Whats App) to share pictures with loved ones.

Is it okay to leave the TV on while my baby is playing nearby?

In many homes, having the TV on in the background is common practice. However, many parents are shocked to learn that background TV should be avoided, where possible. It diverts a child's attention from other worthwhile and important activities such as play, learning and also interferes with language development and parental interactions. I

Background TV can change infants' and toddlers' play patterns in specific ways. It can make it much harder for infants to pick up on the conversations going on around them, making it more difficult for them to learn new words and tune into speech patterns. The competing sounds from the TV also makes it harder to focus and process what other people are saying.

Background TV can also result in less-focused attention during playtime. Instead of lingering with a toy for several minutes, young children tend to play with one toy, tune into the TV and then move onto another toy. This fleeting attention can diminish their focus.

Is it okay to leave music or the radio on when my little one is playing?

Background music that's fast-paced, loud and/or unfamiliar to young children interferes with their learning and play (basically, it causes cognitive overload as children's brains have finite resources to process incoming information.) The research confirms that slow, soft and familiar background music is advised around young children.

I highly recommend use Kinderling- a kid-friendly digital radio station (so you don't have to worry about inappropriate song lyrics, or vulgar DJs). **KINDERLING**

Is it okay to feed my baby and scroll through my phone?

'Brexting' is the colloquial term to describe this relatively new social phenomenon where parents are feeding babies and using their smartphone simultaneously. Some people suggest that mothers have historically been distracted when feeding little ones and that criticising 'brexting' is yet another attempt to make mothers feel guilty. However, when we think about what goes on in a baby's brain when feeding, we start to see how crucial this time is for both mother-infant bonding and their neurological development too.

Early on, given their limited waking hours, feeding time is a unique opportunity for babies to engage in 'facial mapping'- basically babies stare at their caregiver's face and unique regions of the brain are activated (quite different to when looking at an object). If we're *always* glued to our smartphone always watching TV while feeding our little ones, they simply aren't getting the direct gaze that their brains need. They want to stare into our eyes, not watch our faces be illuminated by a screen – they need our direct gaze not our glazed look as we scroll through our phone. We don't want our babies thinking that our phone is part of our visage.

I also understand how tiring and at times, monotonous, it is to sit and feed a baby. So I suggest a more nuanced approach. Like everything, moderation is key. Try not to brext at *every* feed and if you do brext during a feed, make sure that they still get some eye contact and facial mapping time to compensate afterwards.

Is it okay for my baby to watch sport on TV with her father?

Watching sport on TV isn't necessarily *harmful* for babies, but it distracts them and limits the time parents have for serve-and-return interactions, which are essential for their development.

Babies often appear to like the attention-grabbing sound and visual effects from TV –especially when it comes to viewing sports programs – but it's not *necessarily beneficial* for them. Adult-directed content, whether it's the news, sports or game shows, are simply not meaningful to infants. They can't comprehend what they're watching. In many instances, it's their orienting response that's captivated by the changes in scenes and audio.

When parents are watching TV, their attention isn't always on their baby. Babies can sense this. They also need lots of serve-and-return interactions and watching TV can detract from these interactions.

Every now and then a bit of sport watching is unlikely to harm babies, but given their limited awake time, we don't want this precious time to always be dominated by screens.

Is it okay for my baby to play with my phone?

Before handing over your smartphone to your little one, always switch it to Airplane Mode (unless Internet access is required and if it is needed, always try to increase the distance between the device and your baby-at least 40cm away).

There's still some scientific uncertainty about the health impacts associated with WiFi (and other types of electromagnetic radiation), but the World Health Organization(WHO) suggests that we adopt the *precautionary principle* with young children by minimising their exposure.

Given that babies tend to place these devices on their laps (or in their mouths) there are potential health risks, so we're better to err on the side of caution and limit their exposure (I hope I'm just being 'cautious Kristy', but I'd rather take these precautions than look back in years to come and realise that we'd conducted a living experiment with dire consequences).

Try to use the phone *with* your little one and use as much language as possible. For example, you might look at photos or videos saved on your device and describe what was happening. If your child is saying a few words, build on their language skills. If they point and say, "Dadda." You could say, "Yes, it's dada playing at the beach."

Also, be mindful of little ones that suck on smartphones and pop them in their laps. Many digital devices contain nickel which can cause dermatitis and other skin irritations. Always use a protective case before handing over your device to your little one (also protects it from any mishaps).

Key Information About Raising 0-2 Year Olds in a Digital World

- Use screens *very* sparingly, if at all with 0-2 year olds. Remember, there's a displacement effect when they're using a gadget.
- Use technology *with* your infant where possible. Watch a TV show, or DVD and talk to them about what they're watching, look at photos and videos from your phone. Help them to relate what they see on a screen to real life and their experiences. (Remember, their brain is unable to make meaning from a screen until they're at least 18 months of age.)
- If you use technology with your little one, limit technology time to no more than 10-15 minutes/day (maximum).
- If you elect to use screens with your child, use high-quality, educational content (i.e. slow-paced, linear and predictable content with lots of language and repetition).
- There's no rush to dunk little ones in the digital stream. Remember, it takes young children (up until about 30 months of age) twice as long to learn something from a screen than from a live demonstration. Real life interactions and objects are best for under twos. Use screen experiences to complement these experiences.
- Be mindful of your technology habits as a parent/carer.

I've created a [digital workshop](#) that specifically addresses the concerns that parents and prfessionals working with little ones aged 0-2 years have about screens. It will provide you with research-based information so you feel empowered to make informed decisions about screens and your little one

Want Dr Kristy to speak at your event, school, or workplace?

Click here to find out more about her topics, or contact her team (enquiry@drkristygoodwin.com) to enquire about her availability and fees.

About Dr Kristy

Dr Kristy's on a mission to solve parents' and educators' digital dilemmas by arming them with facts (not fears) about raising kids in the digital age. She helps parents ditch the techno-guilt and raise happy, healthy kids who thrive online and offline. Kristy takes the guesswork and guilt out of raising kids in the digital age by translating the latest research, from a range of disciplines into practical and digestible information, tips, and tricks for parents and educators so that they can feel confident and assured that they're raising healthy, happy and balanced kids in the digital age.

Want to learn more?

Dr Kristy travels throughout Australia and Asia to deliver engaging and informative parent and educator seminars.

To enquire about booking Dr Kristy click below

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