RAISING 2-5 YEAR OLDS IN A DIGITAL WORLD:

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

BY DR KRISTY GOODWIN

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About Dr Kristy

Dr Kristy Goodwin is a digital parenting educator (and a 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 (without suggesting we 'digitally amputate' our kids by banning the iPad, or unplugging the TV). Kristy's on a mission to bust the myths and misinformation about young kids, teens 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.

Dr Kristy's book Raising Your Child in a Digital World helps parents of 0-12 year olds ditch the guilt and guesswork associated with raising young kids in the digital age.

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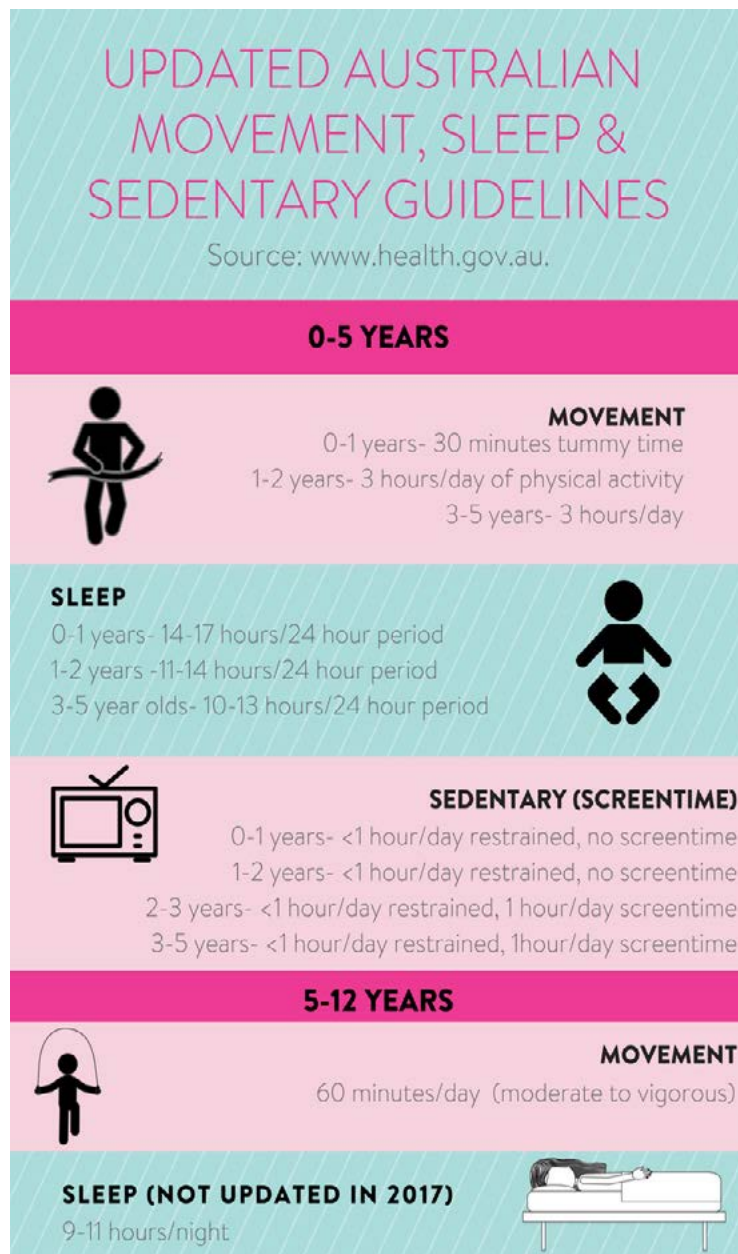*Section 6* - How our screen habits impact our kids

Section 1- How much screen-time is safe/healthy for preschoolers?

How much screen time is 'safe' for my child?

There are no 'safe' screen time thresholds. We don't have scientifically-tested screen time limits that are deemed 'healthy'. Instead, we have recommendations for healthy screen time limits.

In 2017 the Australian Department of Health updated their screen-time guidelines, as part of their Movement, Sleep & Sedentary Guidelines. A summary of the recommendations is provided below in the infographic.

UPDATED AUSTRALIAN MOVEMENT, SLEEP & SEDENTARY GUIDELINES
Source: www.health.gov.au.

0-5 YEARS

MOVEMENT
0-1 years- 30 minutes tummy time
1-2 years- 3 hours/day of physical activity
3-5 years- 3 hours/day

SLEEP
0-1 years- 14-17 hours/24 hour period
1-2 years -11-14 hours/24 hour period
3-5 year olds- 10-13 hours/24 hour period

SEDENTARY (SCREENTIME)
0-1 years- <1 hour/day restrained, no screentime
1-2 years- <1 hour/day restrained, no screentime
2-3 years- <1 hour/day restrained, 1 hour/day screentime
3-5 years- <1 hour/day restrained, 1hour/day screentime

5-12 YEARS

MOVEMENT
60 minutes/day (moderate to vigorous)

SLEEP (NOT UPDATED IN 2017)
9-11 hours/night

SEDENTARY (SCREENTIME)
No more than 2 hours/day with screens for entertainment
Break up long periods of sedentary activity

12-17 YEARS

MOVEMENT
60 minutes/day (moderate to vigorous)
3 days/week activities that strengthen muscles & bones

SLEEP (NOT UPDATED IN 2017)
8-10 hours/night

SEDENTARY (SCREENTIME)
No more than 2 hours/day with screens for entertainment
Break up long periods of sedentary activity

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These guidelines can be a great starting point for parents and professionals agonising over how much time with digital devices is healthy. However, I don't think we need to fixate over the exact amount of time a child spends with a screen. These guidelines have never been scientifically validated and we know that kids all have different tipping points (half an hour playing on the iPad is fine for some kids and for other kids, their behaviour post half an hour on the iPad is horrendous).

Now, I'm not suggesting that we let our preschoolers determine how much screen-time they'd like each day! We just don't need to obsess over quantifying precisely how much time kids spend with screens.

Young kids certainly need screen time limits, but it's difficult to prescribe a precise or universal amount of time simply based on their chronological age (as previous screen time recommendations have tried to do). I suggest parents use the Australian Government Guidelines as a baseline for suggested screen-time limits for 2-5 year olds (i.e. 1 hour/day).

> **"I encourage parents and professionals to ensure that screen time isn't displacing a child's developmental priorities."**

Instead, I encourage parents and professionals to ensure that screen time isn't displacing a child's developmental priorities. Make sure that your child's basic developmental needs are met first and foremost and then determine how much screen time, if any, is available. Preschoolers need opportunities to hear and use language as much as possible, to play outside (green time) and in unstructured ways, be physically active, to get enough sleep and to form relationships (face-to-face interactions). After these basic needs are met, then there's time for screens (or we can consider how each of these basic needs can be enhanced via the use of technology).

My concern is that if we fixate on how much screen time preschoolers accumulate, we can overlook other really important questions (see the next question for more information).

What else do I need to consider other than 'how much' screen-time my child accumulates each day?

Rather than focusing exclusively on 'how much' screen time your child's having each day, I recommend parents focus on:

// **WHAT** are they doing online? Content is king! Is it safe, educational, age-appropriate, supporting their development and/or developing their language skills? If screens are being used in this way then we don't need to fret about their screen time. Phew!

// **WHAT'S** the opportunity cost? What are they missing out on when they're online? Two hours spent watching TV is two hours not spent climbing a tree, wrestling with your brother and reading a book. Whenever our kids use a screen, we need to ask ourselves what's the opportunity cost? What are they not doing as a result of being on a digital device? Kids have seven basic, unchanging developmental needs (relationships/attachments, language, sleep, play, physical movement, nutrition and executive function skills) and we have to ensure that screens aren't eroding or displacing opportunities for these basic needs to be met.

// **WHEN** are kids using screens? The time of the day when kids are using screens can make a huge impact on their behaviour and wellbeing. For example, we need to minimise preschoolers use of back-lit devices like tablets and smartphones in the 90 minute period before nap or sleep time. Studies have shown that these devices can delay the onset of sleep because the blue light suppresses the body's production of melatonin which kids require to fall asleep quickly and easily.

// **HOW** are kids using screens? We need to teach young children healthy digital habits so that their screen-time isn't impacting on their musculoskeletal development, vision, hearing and social skills.

// **WHERE** are kids using screens? We need to preserve tech-free zones in our homes (and classrooms). We also need to ensure that kids are using screens in publicly-accessible places at home (so we can support their learning and keep them safe- as little ones can easily have "appcidents").

When should I buy my child a touchscreen device?

There's absolutely no hurry to dunk your little one in the digital stream. At this stage, we don't have any research that confirms that the early introduction of screens is advantageous for children's future learning and outcomes (the research is showing that young children, over 30 months of age have shown to benefit from using touchscreen devices, if age-appropriate content is selected).

Despite what your child might tell you, they want, but don't necessarily need a tablet device. Much of what they can do on a tablet, they can also do on a parents' smartphone or computer.

Consider why they're asking for a device? Is it for entertainment purposes (much of this could be done on a computer, or a family device)? Is it for educational purposes (could the tasks be completed on a computer or even offline with real materials or pencil and paper)? Is it to create digital content? In some instances, a tablet is the best tool for them, but it's important to determine this from the outset before rushing into purchasing a device.

I'm reluctant to state a specific chronological age (because we know there are huge discrepancies between children of different ages), but I would be cautious about buying a preschool child an individual tablet device. In many instances, younger children can use a 'family' touchscreen device (unless, of course, their school requires that they have their own device. If this is the case, families need to have very clear parameters around children's use of tablet devices at home). If children have individual access to their own device, this can make it extremely difficult for parents to monitor and manage their screen time and is likely to encourage them to use the device for unhealthy amounts of time (if it's Dad's device, often he'll need to retrieve it from his child to actually use it himself).

Section 2- Understanding, dealing with and preventing techno-tantrums

Why does my toddler have a techno-tantrum every.single.time I ask them to switch off the TV, or the tablet device?

Let's be clear, 2-5 year olds are still learning how to emotionally-regulate. So it's a normal (albeit frustrating at times and even embarrassing stage for parents) part of their development. Our preschoolers will emotionally combust when we leave the park after two hours, or if we cut the sandwich in quarters as opposed to halves. Having tantrums is not only normal it's actually an essential, part of their development.

However, unlike 'traditional' tantrums, techno-tantrums can persist until children are much older (I've even seen adolescents throwing techno-tantrums) because of the neurobiological changes that technology causes in the brain and body.

So understanding why your child's having a techno-tantrum (there's nothing wrong with your child) is vital and gives valuable insight into how to prevent techno-tantrums. In the box below, I'll share the main reasons why preschoolers have techno-tantrums and arm you with a repertoire of strategies to prevent them.

PRESCHOOLERS & TECHNO-TANTRUMS

// **Dopamine**

We're fairly certain that screens cause structural and functional changes in the brain (but don't be alarmed because we know that all experiences a child has, be they with or without a screen, cause changes in brain architecture). However, screens, with their sensory seductions and rewards can have a rather dramatic impact on the developing brain, especially for little ones who are still learning how to emotionally-regulate (remember, your 3 year-old may have a tantrum because you cut their toast the wrong way, so it's highly likely that they'll have a tantrum when you ask for your phone back, or the TV to be switched off).

The online world is INTERESTING, INSTANT and IMMEDIATELY REWARDING and if young kids are introduced to screens too early, or spend too much time with screens, it can condition them to expect this type of instant satisfaction and "easy" arousal. However, the real world doesn't emulate this level of instant gratification, so kids won't receive the same levels of satisfaction in the real world. The real world, the analogue, offline world, is dull in comparison and they have to work a lot harder at things for a pleasurable response (and that dopamine release).

Using technology, whether it's mum's iPhone, or watching TV typically is a pleasurable experience for young children. Sometimes it's the sheer act of watching something entertaining (You Tube clips of toys being opened for example), or perhaps they're praised and rewarded for achieving a certain level in a game. As a result, your child's brain is releasing the neurotransmitter 'dopamine' and the reward pathways in their brain are activated. Consequently they want more and more of this neurotransmitter. So when you ask for your smartphone to be returned, or the TV to be switched off, you're literally terminating their supply of dopamine (and hence, the techno tantrum ensues) and this is why children often appear frustrated, angry and irritable after they've been 'screening'. They're having dopamine withdrawals.

Techno-Tantrum Tip- Offer your child appealing transition activities to entice them off the screen. Demanding that they shut the laptop and go and tidy their bedroom is not an appealing transition activity. Give them a choice of 2 different activities that you know that they enjoy doing, so that their dopamine supply isn't completely terminated when they unplug. For example, "When you turn off the TV do you want to jump on the trampoline, or go on your scooter?" (See the later section in this eBook on how physical movement can help with techno-tantrums too).

// Disrupted state of flow

When children are engrossed in an online activity (for example, they're watching funny episodes of Peppa Pig, or they persist with a jigsaw puzzle app) they often enter the 'psychological state of flow'. Csikszentmihalyi coined this term to describe how humans can become so engrossed and immersed in a task that we lose track of time. When children expend a significant amount of mental effort, like they often do when gaming, or watching a TV show they're interested in, they often enter this state of flow. This is why your child may enter the 'digital zombie state' and become oblivious to everyone and everything else, when sitting in front of the TV.

When we walk in the room and demand that they switch off the movie, or finish playing an app, we're literally disrupting their flow state. They're often left feeling frustrated and as a result the techno-tantrum erupts.

Techno-Tantrum Tip – Give your child ample warnings before their screen time will end. This is called 'cognitive priming' and it helps to prepare kids to exit the flow state. However, only use time warnings if your child's old enough to understand the abstract concept of time (for example, telling a 3 year-old that they have, "Five more minutes of TV" is meaningless because time is such an abstract concept for young children under around 6 years of age). Instead, give them quantities (e.g. "I'd like you to turn off the TV when the next episode finishes.") or hard endpoints (e.g. "I'd like you to turn off the iPad when you finish building your truck.") Make sure that you make eye contact with your child to ensure that they've actually heard you because chances are that they're

so engrossed with their online activity, that they may not actually hear you when you give them a verbal warning. "Yeah Mum!" is often a default, generic response our kids give when we bark orders at them to turn off technology.

//State of insufficiency

The online world causes children to feel like they're never finished. There's always one more episode to watch on TV thanks to 24-hour streaming, or another level in a game that they can reach, or another app to play. This is why You Tube is like a digital candy store for kids! Preschoolers never feel like they're finished in the online world, as there's no finite cut-off point. Unlike a book that has a final chapter, or a Lego set where there's a sense of completion, our kids don't ever get that feeling of satiation or satisfaction in the digital world. There's always more digital seductions enticing them.

This is tricky to manage with young children because we struggle with this too as adults (raising my guilty digital hand to say that I find it hard to go to bed without one final check of my inbox because I know there's always something else I can look at).

Techno-Tantrum Tip – We need to establish and enforce firm boundaries around screen time. We need to impose a finish line for our kids. We need to have firm rules around how long they can use devices and then stick to these rules (even when they combust into the techno-tantrum because over time these will diminish if we're consistent with our rules). We need to have these conversations about rules before the device is switched on. So give your child a hard cut off point. For example, you could say,"When you get to Level 3 I want you to turn it off." or "When you finish this episode of Octonauts and then I want you to switch it off."

// Brain is primed for novelty

The prefrontal cortex, which is the part of the brain responsible for managing children's impulses and some of their other higher-order thinking skills, has a novelty bias. This means it's always seeking novel information and stimulus- new and interesting things are desired. The prefrontal cortex is under constant threat in the digital world as it's continually bombarded by the sensory smorgasbord the online world offers. However, the developing brain is not yet wired to cope with this constant onslaught of information (actually this part of the brain isn't fully developed until their twenties).

And this is exactly why your little ones find it so hard to switch off You Tube or turn off TV- there's a constant, never-ending supply of new entertainment.

The offline world simply doesn't offer this constant state of novelty and interest. Time in nature is a lot slower paced and doesn't offer the immediate rewards and pleasure that the online world provides.

Techno-Tantrum Tip – Balance your child's screen time and 'green time'. Provide plenty of unplugged time in nature each day where they don't use screens. This will ensure that their brains become accustomed to the slower pace and not conditioned on the constant rewards that the online world offers.

// Overloaded nervous systems

There are so many sensory inputs for preschoolers to process when they're using screens (sound effects, background music, animations, videos, colours, graphics just to name a few). This can cause young children, or children with sensory processing difficulties, a sensory overload. As a result, their sensory and nervous systems can become overwhelmed and kids can "melt-down" when they come off the screen. It's common for kids to emotionally-combust and appear agitated, moody or irritable after they've used a screen. They've become

hyper-aroused. Whilst we don't yet know why, anecdotally we're hearing reports that boys, more than girls, are affected by screens in this way.

Techno-Tantrum Tip– allow kids to empty their sensory cups after they've used a screen. You can do this by getting them to run around outside, ride their bikes, go for a walk, put their feet on the grass, roll down a hill, lay on the swings, climb up and down the stairs, use play-doh. Basically, you want them to be physically active and re-set their sensory and nervous systems. Try and recognise your child's preferred sensory system and cater for this preference.

For example, is your child a "toucher"? If so, provide them with opportunities to use their tactile system, like playing playdoh, or in the sand, or using shaving cream after they've used a screen.

If you use screens before dinner time (and many of us do, myself included), give your child an opportunity to empty their sensory cup before they sit at the table. This will have a remarkable impact on their eating (I promise, I've road-tested this and so have many other families who've listened to my Parent Seminars and the results are amazing!).

Techno-Tantrum Tips – allow your child to chew ice*. It helps to regulate the vagus nerve which can quickly calm down children. *Obviously only do this if it's safe for your child to chew ice.. Also, use physical touch. Touching your child, via a few strokes of the arm, a head rub, or some tickle-backs can help your child's body produce oxytocin which can help them calm their sensory and nervous systems.

As a mum who has experienced her fair share of techno-tantrums with her kids, I wish I could offer you a silver bullet, or guaranteed solution. And no, there's no app that can predict your child's techno-tantrum. However, techno-tantrums are inevitable (and a normal part of development- see my previous section) but there are some simple things you can do to reduce their likelihood or the severity.

Here are some general tips to reduce the likelihood of experiencing a techno-tantrum:

// **Set firm guidelines**- as a family you need to establish (and enforce) firm guidelines about 'how much' screen time your child can have each day. Determine an amount that's right for your little one. Have these discussions before a screen is turned on and in an informal and playful way. Don't have these conversations when your little one is having a techno-tantrum as the part of their brain (amygdala) that's responsible for their emotional response has taken over.

// **Give two gentle reminders**- remember, children often become completely engrossed with what they're watching/playing/creating when using a gadget because they enter the psychological state of "flow". Before their time is about to expire on their digital device, give them verbal warnings that their time is about the expire (preschool boys are still developing their receptive language skills, so sometimes hand gestures can work really well too). Make sure that they make eye contact with you and acknowledge what you've said, as they often become so engrossed with what they're watching/playing that they

// **Give them quantities**- up until around 6 years of age (sometimes a little later), kids don't actually understand the abstract concept of time. So giving them a screen time-limit is meaningless. Instead, give younger children, or kids who haven't yet mastered time precise quantities. For example, you might say, "You can watch two episodes of Peppa Pig today." or, "You can watch three You Tube clips."

// **Set the exact finish time**- if your child does understand time limits, sometimes we forget what time kids actually started using their screen (I do, anyway). Instead, giving a precise "switch off" time is an effective strategy, as it is firm, non-negotiable parameter. For example, if the TV is switched on at 3:30pm and you're happy for them to watch for 30 minutes, tell them that the TV will be switched off at 4pm (for little ones still learning to read a clock, popping two little post-it notes on the analogue clock for the cutoff time can work really well, as it's a concrete reminder of the time limit).

// **Use a sand timer**- your child is much less likely to argue with a sand timer than with you! You could also use the timer on your digital device (e.g. iPhone or iPad) to set and enforce screen time limits, but remember most preschoolers won't have a conceptual understanding of what half an hour is.

// **Empty their sensory cups**- for many children, particularly boys and/or children with sensory processing difficulties, it's essential that they empty their sensory cup after using a screen. Screens can overload kids' nervous and sensory systems (because there's so much sensory input to process when they're plugged in). So often, techno-tantrums are an emotional and physical 'release' because their sensory system is bombarded. Simple activities to empty their sensory cup include riding a bike, going for a walk, sitting in nature, rolling, climbing stairs, push-ups, star jumps, playing with playdoh, using essential oils, rolling on a ball. Basically, it's anything physical and activates their sensory system at a slower pace.

// **Act as a bridge**- to help your child transition away from a screen, without tears and tantrums, act as a bridge between the screen and the real world. We need to help our kids gently disconnect from the screen and re-enter the real world. Sit down next to your child and enter their digital world (perhaps play the iPad game with them, or sit on the lounge and cuddle up next to them as they watch TV). 30 to 60 seconds is sufficient. Ask them to explain what they've been watching/playing. Once they start talking, you're helping them to re-enter the real world. You've helped to build a bridge between the digital and real world, without them emotionally combusting.

// **Encourage your child to switch off the device**- ask your child to switch off the device (i.e. turn off the TV, power down the tablet, turn the gaming console off), instead of you walking in the room and quickly flicking off the TV, or prying the tablet from their hands. This helps them to feel like they're in control. It's a trivial gesture to adults, but very empowering for little ones.

// **Have an appealing transition activity**- remember, using a screen is a pleasurable experience for your child (their brain is releasing the neurotransmitter dopamine). So encourage them to turn off the device and offer them a selection (two choices is fine) of activities to participate in. For example, you could say, "Turn off the iPad. Then, would you like to go for a bike ride, or have a wrestle with Dad?"

// **Play bad cop**- if you experience a techno-tantrum after using the tips above, have a direct consequence related to device use. For example, your child may not be able to use your smartphone the next day because they couldn't pass it back when you told them their time was up. You only need to implement this tip once or twice and your child (usually) soon learns that these limits are enforceable (and their desire to use the digital device is a very strong motivator for them).

Remember, your child is still learning how to emotionally-regulate. This isn't always an easy skill to learn. Firm, consistent and loving boundaries from a parent/carer will help them to develop these essential life skills.

Section 3- How can I keep my child safe online?

What cyber-safety concerns are facing preschoolers?

Sadly, there are a raft of online safety concerns facing all parents, including parents of preschoolers now. Years ago, parents of preschoolers certainly never had to worry about cyber-safety, but this time has now passed. I suggest that parents of preschoolers be alert and alarmed.

Touchscreen technologies mean that many preschoolers are using Internet-enabled devices. It's much easier to navigate an iPad, than a desktop computer or laptop that requires advanced fine motor skills for preschoolers. This early exposure to the Internet makes it harder for parents to keep their ids safe when using these devices.

There are two chief cyber-safety concerns facing parents of preschoolers- content and contact. The major cyber-safety content issues facing our preschoolers are access to developmentally-inappropriate content such as scary or violent content, pornography and contact concerns include access to unknown people and pedophiles.

The problem with our preschoolers (in fact with all children) seeing inappropriate content is that they can't un-see it. If preschoolers are accidentally exposed to pornography, or a violent video clip, they lack the cognitive skills to process and deal with what they've viewed. This can have a significant and catastrophic impact on their development. So it's essential that we protect our young kids from seeing inappropriate content.

Is YouTube or You Tube Kids safe for my preschooler?

No! The content on both platforms (even You Tube Kids) isn't curated. I've had many parents of preschoolers tell me about some terrible content their preschoolers have accessed whilst watching YouTube. There's a current trend called 'digital doctoring' or 'elsagate' where videos involving pop-ular children's characters are being misappropriated, or being depicted in sexual or violent acts. Some of the videos show common fears preschoolers would have such as being left behind, getting injections, getting their foot caught in the escalator. However, other videos are much more explicit involve the simulation of sexual acts and fetishes, dismemberment, cannibalism and kidnapping. Typically, popular characters like Elsa the princess, Spiderman and Peppa Pig who star in the clips, which often take a sinister turn.

Tip - if your child wants to watch TV or video content, used walled garden provides such as ABC for Kids, Nickelodeon Junior, or Netflix. If your child wants to watch YouTube (there's some great content on there, but also some really appaling stuff too), create playlists of curated content that you know is appropriate. You can also an app called iTubeList where you can not only create playlists, but this app also prevents kids from seeing the other previews of other videos in the right-hand side of YouTube and also disables the comments below the video.

How can I prevent my preschooler from having an 'appcident' (i.e. downloading or deleting apps)?

Ensure you have parental controls set up on every digital device your little one has access to, which will allow you to stop them installing or deleting apps. You can also set up restrictions, on most devices, in terms of what content your child can access.

I've recently had parents tell me about their three year old daughter who was using her father's iPad and managed to FaceTime her father's boss, instead of watching Dora the Explorer! So it's vital that you set up parental controls and restrict their access to apps, websites and TV shows.

How do I keep my child safe online?

Sadly, there's no web filter or list of parental control settings that can completely guarantee your child's safety when using a tablet device. No Internet-filtering tool is fail safe. And today's kids are tech-savvy so they can often use your tablet device in ways that you didn't even think of (or the manufacturer for that matter). So the best thing that we can do as parents is keep digital devices in public places in the family home so that it's easy to keep an eye on what they're doing and keep involved and co-view (use the gadget with them) where possible.

Most devices now have parental control settings which are unique to that device, so it's worth checking on your device manufacturer's' website or doing a quick Google search to make sure that you have the most up-to-date settings installed on your device (remember, these can change when software is updated).

TECH TIP - Use Internet filtering software and setup Parental Controls on all devices. To give me peace of mind with my kids, I personally use and recommend The Family Zone. It allows you to not only limit what kids can access on tablets, smartphones, smart TVs and gaming consoles, but it also helps parents manage screen time, so you can more easily manage the amount of time your child uses screens.

As a bare minimum, you want to ensure that your settings have:

- Disabled in-app purchases (prevent any 'appcidents' by not allowing your child to make expensive in-app purchases on tablets and smartphones).

- Disable app installation or deletion in your settings. You want to know exactly what apps your child has access to on their device. As parents, we need to know the digital playgrounds where our kids are playing.

- Set up Guided Access (on iOS devices) and Sure Lock (on Android devices) if you'd prefer that your child stays in one app and not jumps between apps. There are instructions here to help you do this on iOS devices. This also helps to teach your child to manage their attention span, as opposed to jumping in and out of apps.

- Set filters on what videos and music can be accessed. (For example, parents can decide which types shows, music and ratings are suitable for children to access in iTunes, according to their chronological age).

- Set restrictions to determine which apps are displayed and the functionality of the app (for example, you can disable multi-player mode for some apps, or geotagging capabilities in other apps if you don't want your child's location recorded when they're using particular apps.)

- Set the maximum sound level on the device. (see the following section on healthy digital habits).

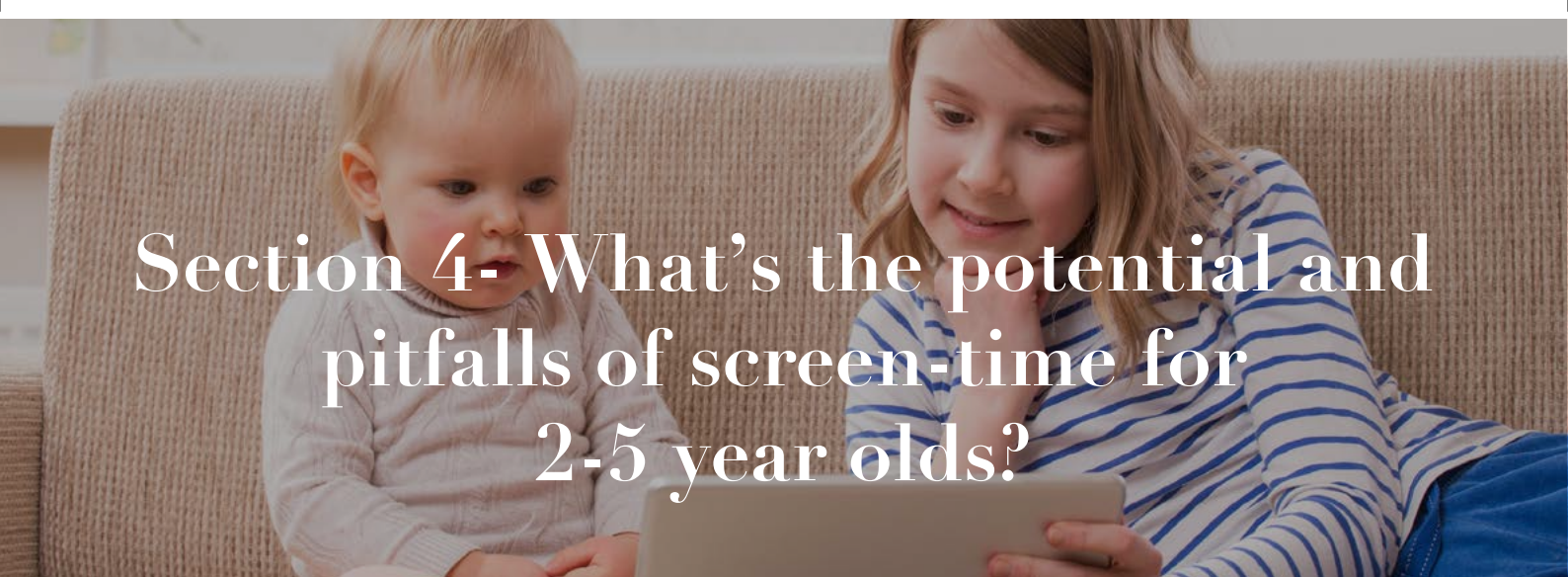- Turn off geolocation settings so photos don't have metadata attached.

Section 4- What's the potential and pitfalls of screen-time for 2-5 year olds?

Can my preschooler learn from the TV or iPad?

The research tells us that toddlers 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. Remember, they can learn from these devices, they just learn less. This is the video deficit, which explains young children, particularly up until around 30 months, learn half as much and recall it for much shorter periods of time when using touch screens.

If you do want to use technology with your preschooler, 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. Explore new words or ideas, sounds and images online. Try to connect what they're watching on DVDs and TV to their life and experiences (to compensate for the video deficit). 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.

Is watching TV okay for my preschooler?

One of the most common myths related to kids and technology is that TV is 'bad' for them so, as parents, we're often surprised (and elated) to hear that TV can actually be beneficial to our children. Rest assured, there's a substantial body of research that has shown that age-appropriate and well-designed TV programs, such as Sesame Street, Dora the Explorer, can actually help preschool-ers learn. Numerous studies have found that educational and age-appropriate content can help preschoolers learn and enhance their language and cognitive development. Obviously, content is paramount, and it's critical that we provide educational programs for young children while ensuring that their screen time is not excessive.

What makes a TV program educational for preschoolers?

repetition – the human brain literally hankers repetition. This is why our child wants us to read the same book every single night. And it is why Dora repeats the same language throughout each episode. Children's TV programs employ language repetition to help children learn new vocabulary or concepts.

a linear storyline – TV programs for children should follow a straightforward storyline. There should be a beginning, middle and end. Too many plot twists or deviations from this format can confuse young children.

predictability – a predictable format allows for familiarity and means children can dedicate their attention to understanding the episode, not anticipating what might happen next.

a very slow-pace – rapid-fire, fast-paced screen action is often too much for young brains to focus on and places extra demands on their attention. This can cause cognitive overload whereby the child tends to focus on the less essential aspects of the TV program (ie they might process the animated characters' actions and incidental comments, not the plot).

interactivity – look for programs that encourage participatory interaction such as asking children questions or encouraging them to do something physical while they watch. For example, Play School and Sesame Street often pose children questions during the episode and suggest off-screen activities at the end of episodes.

Is it okay to give my child an iPad or my iPhone to divert a tantrum, or whenever they're bored?

Many parents have handed over the digital pacifier, aka the iPad or remote control, and marvelled at the speed at which it calms down children. I'm raising my guilty hand here. I'm the first to admit that I've handed over my iPhone to my distressed toddler, in the back of the car when we were stuck in horrendous traffic in Sydney. It worked. Quick smart.

However, reverting to technology to avert a tantrum or placate an upset or agitated child isn't advised. There's no doubt about it, it can been perceived as an 'effective strategy'- it works and usually pretty smart. However, always doing this can have adverse, long-term consequences.

Our kids, particularly 2-5 year olds, need to experiences big emotions. If we're always handing over the iPad, or our smartphone whenever they're bored, frustrated, angry, tired etc, we're teaching our kids to seek solace in screens. What we're not teaching them is how to handle their big feelings. Kids need to know how to cope with their feelings in appropriate ways and if we bypass this opportunity, our kids will miss out on developing vital skills.

> **"If we're always handing over the iPad, or our smartphone whenever they're bored, frustrated, angry, tired etc, we're teaching our kids to seek solace in screens. What we're not teaching them is how to handle their big feelings."**

What sorts of screen-time activities are educational for preschoolers?

If you want to use technology with your preschooler look for activities that are creative, interactive, develop language skills and have a social component. Now, you don't have to meet all of the criteria above in every technology experience.

Some good examples include:
- // book apps
- // audio books
- // educational TV programs (see section above for suggestions)
- // interactive apps (Play Time and ABC Kids Play apps are great interactive apps for pre schoolers)
- // storytelling apps (where children can insert their own pictures and narrate the story - Playschool Art Maker)

Is it okay for my child to eat dinner with the iPad, or in front of the TV?

Avoid falling into this habit, where possible. Screen dinners can have adverse impacts on kids' eating habits and can also erode opportunities for language development and social interaction.

The dinner table isn't immune to the screen invasion that is creeping into every aspect of our lives. In a 2015 poll conducted by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 24% of two-year-old children use technology at the dinner table and by the age of eight, it was nearly 45%.
Now I'm not suggesting that there's anything wrong with the occasional screen dinner. I confess, we love Mexican and a movie on many a Saturday night (let's be honest and say it's most Saturday nights because I'm too pooped to cook!). There's nothing wrong with occasionally eating in front of the TV (or the iPad, or the digital device of choice). There's nothing wrong with occasionally having to take an important call at the dinner table.

> **" We need to preserve tech-free zones and times with our kids and meal areas is one of those areas."**

As a mum (and a researcher), I firmly believe that we need to keep meal-times as a sacred time where we unplug from our devices and connect with each other (where we can, most of the time). The dinner table needs to be a sacred place, where we're not distracted by alerts and notifications. A place where our conversations aren't truncated or side-tracked because something flashes or vibrates on our device. A dedicated place where we can really connect.

Pediatric nutritionists and dieticians who are reporting that they're working with increasing numbers of children who are presenting with taste sensitivities and preferences in recent times. Anecdotal evidence suggests that having the screen on during meal-times may promote mindless eating. Children aren't truly tasting foods and therefore aren't developing a full taste repertoire. They're also more likely to want to eat 'easy' foods that don't require lots of mastication (chewing) when they're digitally distracted. It seems that screens may actually interfere with the formation of young children's eating habits and preferences!

When we use screens at the dinner table, our kids' sensory systems are being bombarded by a range of sensory stimulus that the online world throws at them. There are sound effects, moving graphics, music, alerts and notifications just to name a few. All of these sensory inputs are impacting on our children's sensory processing capacities. If there's too much being projected at our child, or if their sensory processing skills are still developing (which they typically are in young children), it's like turning on the hose at full speed and expecting a tea-cup to catch it. Their sensory system gets overwhelmed.

This sensory bombardment means that it's difficult for children, particularly young children who are still developing their taste preferences and palette, to concentrate on the act of eating if their sensory system is being seduced by screens. They simply don't have the mental bandwidth to focus on eating (which uses most senses).
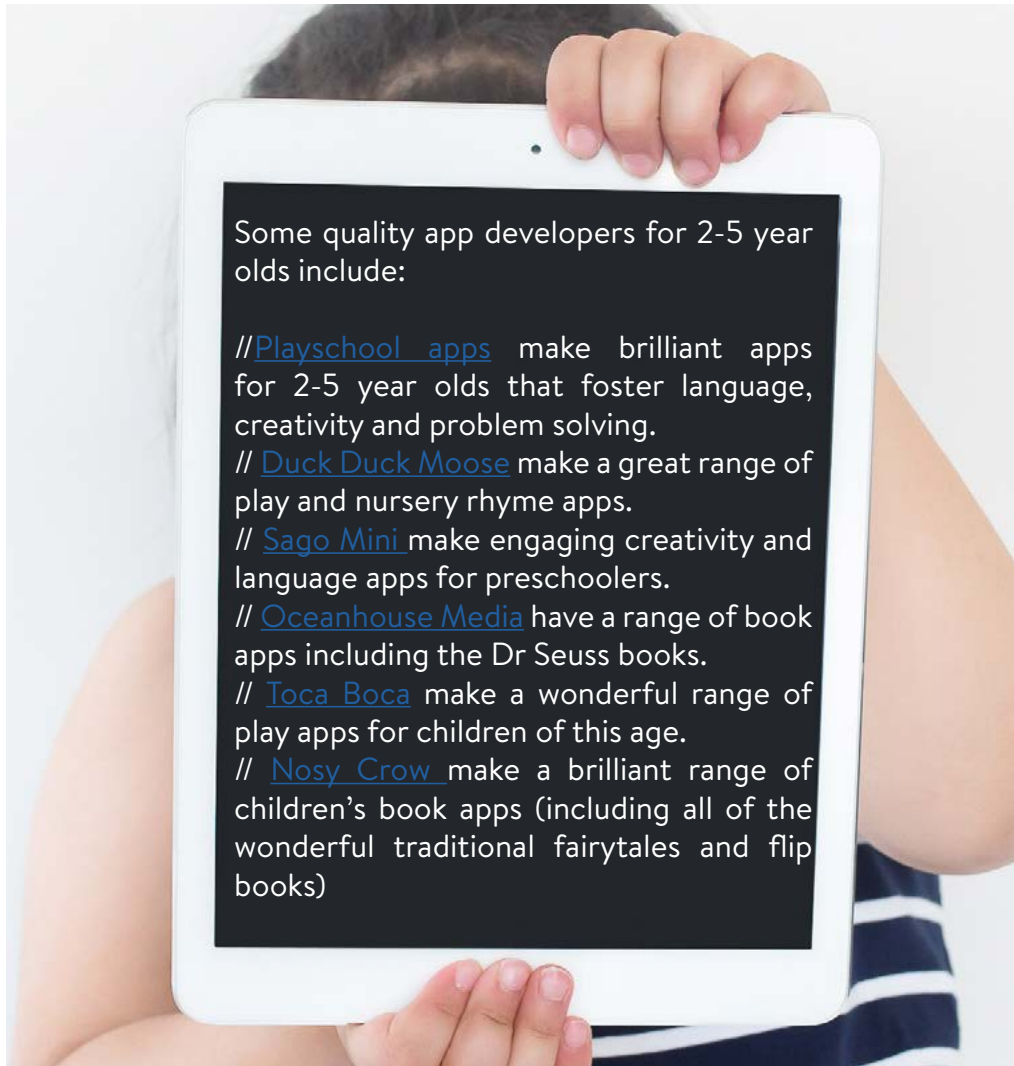
Some quality app developers for 2-5 year olds include:

//Playschool apps make brilliant apps for 2-5 year olds that foster language, creativity and problem solving.
// Duck Duck Moose make a great range of play and nursery rhyme apps.
// Sago Mini make engaging creativity and language apps for preschoolers.
// Oceanhouse Media have a range of book apps including the Dr Seuss books.
// Toca Boca make a wonderful range of play apps for children of this age.
// Nosy Crow make a brilliant range of children's book apps (including all of the wonderful traditional fairytales and flip books)
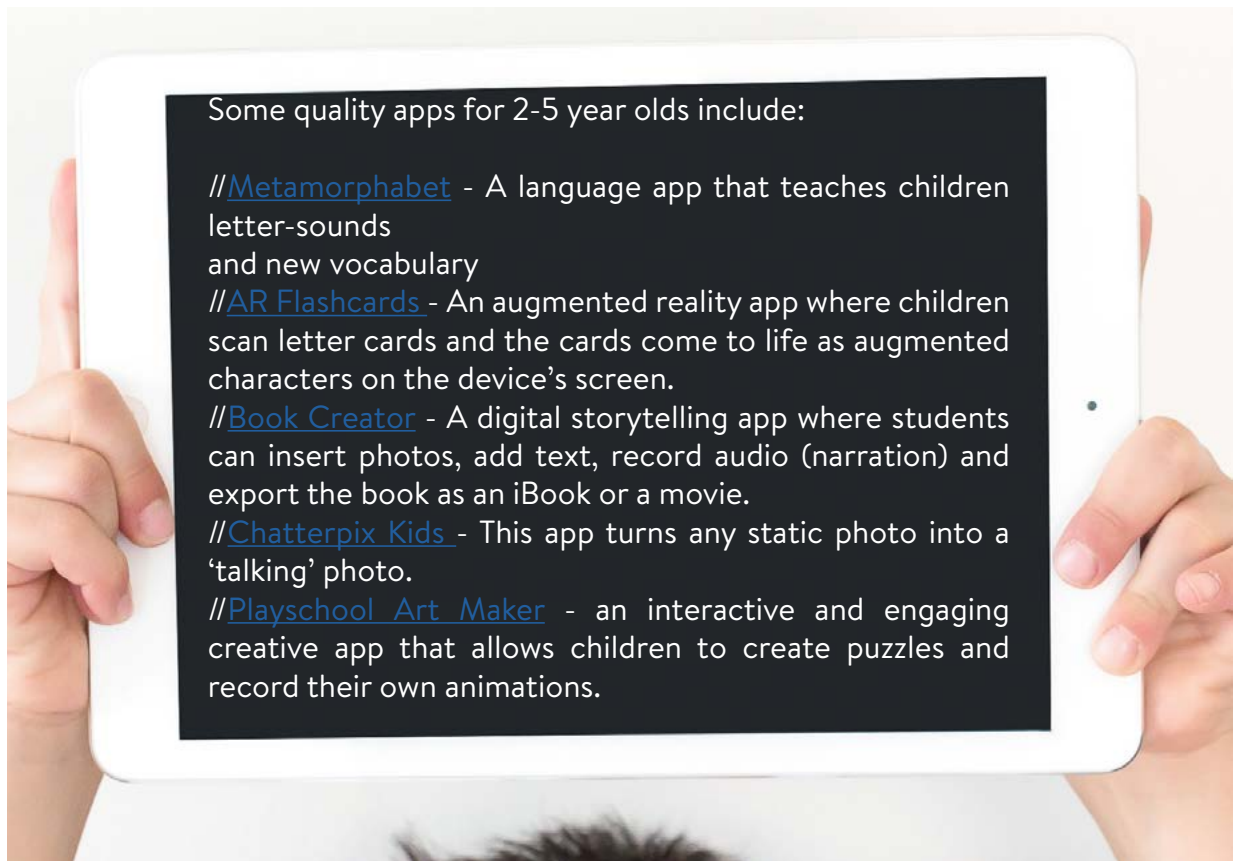
Some quality apps for 2-5 year olds include:

//Metamorphabet - A language app that teaches children letter-sounds
and new vocabulary
//AR Flashcards - An augmented reality app where children scan letter cards and the cards come to life as augmented characters on the device's screen.
//Book Creator - A digital storytelling app where students can insert photos, add text, record audio (narration) and export the book as an iBook or a movie.
//Chatterpix Kids - This app turns any static photo into a 'talking' photo.
//Playschool Art Maker - an interactive and engaging creative app that allows children to create puzzles and record their own animations.

Is it okay to leave the TV on when my kids are around?

In a nutshell, no. Having the TV on in the background is common practice in many homes, as it's often the everyday soundtrack and is usually on in a room where a child is doing something else other than watching it. While background TV may seem quite benign, it can have actually have unintended consequences, especially for a child's language skills and social well being. It can disrupt children's play patterns, alter their attention and focus, interfere with their development of language skills and change the ways in which parents interact with their children.

Parent tech tip: switch off the TV when it's not in use. Background TV appears harmless but it can have a negative impact on a child's language and play skills.

Do I need to worry about my child watching scary movies?

Many children experience night terrors from time-to-time (and that's normal), but parents are often surprised to learn that sometimes it's their child's screen habits that may be contributing to these terrors.

Children often report more frequent night terrors after they've watched age-inappropriate or scary content and they can also become more severe if children are worried about a situation they've seen in a movie or video game. Violent or inappropriate programming can also increase the chances of children having problems falling asleep and/or staying asleep or having nightmares.

It's not just movies and games that we need to be wary of, but it's also scary images and events that are featured on the news and in movie trailers and promotions. Promotional content is often un-predictable and can contain intense or disturbing material that isn't appropriate for young children (children don't typically learn to distinguish fantasy from reality until they're approximately 3–5 years of age). Children under 10 are still particularly susceptible to experiencing intense fear as a result of viewing images out of context or intense violence or devastation. This is another reason why co-viewing is essential and why we must be careful about what children watch on-screens.

Why does my little one like watching the same movie (over and over and over again)?

Children's brains are forming neural pathways (connections between neurons). These neural pathways are strengthened by repeated experiences. So it's not surprising that the kids crave repetition. Our children want to watch the same movie (or play the same app, or read the same book) because their brain is craving repetition. It's their way of mastering new language and comprehending what they've seen online. So the next time your little one asks to watch the same movie or TV episode, remember that they're building their neural pathways (not trying to frustrate you).

Why is my preschooler obsessed with watching unboxing YouTube videos (i.e. videos of toys being opened)?

Unboxing videos, where children literally watch other children unwrap eggs or open toys on YouTube , have become increasingly popular (and they're the chief marketing strategy for toy manufacturers). Kids are mesmerised by manicured or tiny hands that hover over toy boxes or toy eggs and slowly unwrap packages and gifts. Unboxing videos have attracted thousands, even millions of viewers and are a lucrative business for some video creators.

The anticipation associated with unwrapping a gift actually releases adrenaline and endorphins in the brain. So when your little one is viewing these types of videos they're actually having a neurobiological response, which makes it difficult for them to switch off these videos.

In essence, these are lengthy advertorials. They're very different to traditional 15-second TV commercials. As parents we need to be wary of this indirect form of advertising and consumerism. The pleasure associated with buying can also release dopamine, the feel-good neurotransmitter and kids naturally want more and more of that feeling! So children can become very dependent on these videos.

Basically, limit your child's viewing of unboxing videos. Have strict limits on what they can watch and the exact number of episodes and try to co-view or ask them questions about what they were viewing and discuss the subliminal ways the toys is being advertised to them.

Are Internet-enabled toys safe for my child?

// **Possible Security Breaches**

Using techno-toys with Internet-enabled capabilities, children can divulge sensitive or private information. For example, Hello Barbie can record and save private discussions that your child has in their own bedroom) and there's no guarantee that this data is secure (even with the best security systems in place there have significant data beaches.

In recent years a major security breach involving children's technology companies that make techno-toys such as children's laptops and tablets, highlighted the potential damaging effects of data breaches, with over 6 million children and 5 million parent VTech accounts being compromised. Chat logs, photos, as well as sensitive online data such as names, birth dates and security question data were leaked online.

Sadly, data breaches aren't uncommon. It's a reality in a digital world. However, such breaches are a significant concern when it comes to children's data. Leaked records of personal family exchanges, photos of children and/or video recordings are potentially very damaging (and will become a bigger threat as more and more Internet-enabled toys penetrate the children's toy market).

When considering if you'll allow your child to have an Internet-enabled toy and what information you'll allow them to record and divulge online, ask yourself: Would you be happy if a stranger came into your home and watched what your children were playing and doing? Would you be happy if a stranger asked your child private questions on the street? I didn't think so. So be mindful and limit what data you allow your child to divulge, record or upload via their techno-toys.

It's imperative that we don't divulge private or unnecessary information, especially when it comes to our kids. We're often required to do this when setting up Internet-enabled toys. But pause and ask yourself, does the manufacturer really need to know your child's date of birth?

We really don't know how this data will be used and we're certainly not guaranteed of the security measures surrounding its storage. No security measure is impenetrable.

This is whole new ball game for modern parents (and gosh, wouldn't life be a lot easier if our kids only wanted simple 'ball games' or they still loved 'board games'?).

Tips -

• Only divulge information that's absolutely critical for the toy to properly function. Does the toy manufacturer really need to know your child's surname, address, gender and date of birth?

• Follow basic cyber-safety principles and talk to your kids about privacy- regularly change passwords, use nonsense responses to security questions (e.g. Q: What is your favourite colour? A: Dogs), set up and use a generic email account for all toys and online accounts for your child (and maintain ownership of this account) and use a credit card with a small credit limit (if one is required at all).

// Possible Health Impacts Associated with Internet-Enabled Toys

Now I know that this is a contentious topic- kids' health and potential WiFi risks. As 'cautious Kristy' I recommend that parents err on the side of caution when it comes to kids and WiFI access. We don't yet have a complete scientific understanding of the long-term health implications associated with young children's exposure to electromagnetic radiation (EMR) that comes from using Internet-enabled devices. So we're conducting a bit of a living experiment (as I've explained in these blog posts here and here).

If kids are playing with Internet-enabled devices that are kept close to their physical body, or even worse, sleep with, then there may be possible health risks. There may potentially be exposed to unhealthy amounts of EMR. We just don't know for sure what the long-term effects of this early exposure may be and what safe thresholds look like for kids.

Given our lack of scientific evidence about EMR impacts on children, we need to adopt what the American Academy of Paediatrics suggest and adopt the precautionary principle. I think we need to minimise our children's exposure and this means limiting their use of techno-toys (I'm not suggesting no techno-toys).

Tips -

- minimise children's time spent with Internet-enabled toys;
- discourage children from placing such devices close to their physical body (as a minimum, I suggest at least elbow to fingertip away from their body); and
- switch off the WiFi function when it's not required.

// Techno-toys change the ways kids play

There are also concerns that techno-toys change the ways that children play. Techno-toys tend to control the play situation. They're typically pre-programmed by an adult who determines how the toy will be used (and there's little opportunity for your child to use the toy in a creative way). This is very different to a set of wooden blocks or a truck or doll where the child determines what the toy can do.

Today's digital kids still need opportunities to engage in open-ended and creative play. They need to construct and reconstruct their play contexts. They need to imagine, explore, solve problems and come up with creative ideas and contexts in which to play (this is why wooden blocks and the humble cardboard box are amongst the best toys you can give your child).

Tips -

- Use the 'formula' when it comes to selecting toys for your child (whether it's traditional or techno-toys): 90% about what the child can do and 10% about what the toy can do
- Balance what goes into your child's toy-box. There's still merit in more traditional toys. Balance the use of techno-toys with traditional toys.

Are there any benefits of preschoolers using techno-toys?

Techno-toys certainly offer new ways to play and they're not necessarily 'bad'. They can certainly offer exciting and new opportunities for children to interact, explore and communicate in completely new ways. Techno-toys can also be a great stimulus for real play too. Kids can use their techno-toys and integrate them into their play experiences.

Toca Hair Salon app is a brilliant augmented reality app that enables children to play hairdressers. Children insert a photograph of themselves (or their parents or siblings) and then use a range of tools to create elaborate haircuts and designs. And this app doesn't require parents to or children to divulge personal information for the app to work! It's a great example of a techno-toy that encourages children to play, interact with their peers or siblings and develops their language skills.

Techno-toys aren't necessarily 'bad' for kids, they just need to be carefully selected and monitored (especially in terms of kids divulging sensitive information) and of course balanced with 'analogue', off-screen toys.

Section 5- Healthy screen habits for preschoolers

Are there any places where kids shouldn't use screens at home?

Establishing tech-free zones is really important. If families can establish healthy digital habits from a young age, this makes it much more manageable when kids are older. Trust me, your future self will thank you!

Suggested tech-free places:

// Bedrooms- screens can compromise kids' sleep and it's a major cyber-safety risk if kids have technology in their bedrooms.

// Play areas- digital technologies can distract play, so keep them out of places where kids play.

// Meal areas- we want to preserve the table as a sacred place for conversation and interaction. We also know that eating meals with a screen can interfere with and compromise kids' eating habits and preferences because they're not mindfully eating.

// Bathrooms- I think it goes without saying!

// Cars- I think short-distance car trips should be device-free. Car rides can be a great opportunity to have conversations and give kids a chance to daydream and mind wander (aka daydream).

Is it okay to hand over my phone at a restaurant to keep my little one quiet?

Again, this is another personal choice parents and families need to determine. It's also worthwhile considering that the rules you have now, may need re-evaluating in another year or two (as any parent knows, parenting is constantly evolving and changing....especially when you think you've nailed the new stage you're at). Sometimes the rules need to bend too because of extenuating circumstances.

I completely understand how lovely it is to have an uninterrupted meal with your partner (does it feel like a distant memory for you too?). I really do. But young kids, especially preschoolers, aren't designed to sit still at cafes or restaurants- it's not how their brains are wired (from aged 2-3 their sensory and motor regions of their brain are under construction, so they need ample opportunities to touch things and move...hence why the wiggle in restaurants)! So they're supposed to be 'busy' and active at these places. That's why offering a digital device will work- as it diverts their attention

and soothes them.

Parents need to be careful about what habits they set up with their kids and technology. If you decide to offer your kids a phone or tablet device at a restaurant, your kids can quickly expect this every time they visit a cafe or restaurant. Kids, from a very young age, can form associations and if they associate a restaurant or cafe with a digital device, this can be a hard habit to break.

My concern, as both a researcher and mum, is the opportunity cost if we always use phones at restaurants and cafes to digitally distract or entertain our kids. Placating our kids with a digital device means there's a lost opportunity for them to practice and refine vital social skills. Restaurant manners and social skills are skills that kids need to learn- waiting for a meal (and coping with the boredom), ordering your meal, thanking the wait staff, engaging in conversation with your fellow table guests are all learned skills (and definitely take time to acquire). If we resort to always using digital devices to distract kids when we're out, then they'll bypass the chance to learn these new skills.

Is it okay for my child to use a touchscreen device in their bedroom?

Children's bedrooms really should be tech-free zones. The use of screens before sleep time can be problematic, particularly mobile devices because they emit blue light. Blue lit screens can be detrimental to a child's sleep habits as it suppresses the body's production of melatonin, which is required to help children to fall asleep quickly and easily. This can result in sleep delays and over time these sleep delays (perhaps they're only 10 or 20 minutes here and there) accumulate into a sleep deficit. Inadequate sleep has ramifications on children's capacity to learn, their physical and emotional health.. And general family functioning (anyone who's experienced the aftermath of a tired preschooler knows what I'm alluding to here).

If kids are taught from a young age that their bedrooms are tech-free zones, then enforcing these limits when they're older will be easier. Once kids are older, using phones in bedrooms is not only detrimental to the quality and quantity of their sleep, but also poses a serious cyber-safety risk.

Parent tech tip: Establish a digital bedtime. In an ideal world 90 minutes before nap or sleep time should be screen-free. If this isn't feasible, dim the brightness on the screen, increase the distance between your child and the screen (this is sometimes why TV is a better option before sleep time, than mobile devices as they don't emit as much blue light) and be mindful of what content they're watching before bedtime (remember, scary content can have catastrophic impacts on their sleep and fast-paced screen action can also hyper-arouse little ones).

Are there any times of the day when I need to be careful about my preschooler using a screen?

As outlined above, before sleep or nap time should ideally be screen-free time. The other time of the day where parents need to be careful about what screen choices they offer little ones, is before childcare or structured activity (dancing or swimming lessons). If we offer preschoolers rapid-fire, fast-paced TV shows, or highly interactive apps or games before childcare or other activities it can set their brain and nervous system up for this level of arousal. Now, your child could have the most engaging and dynamic educator, but they're no match for the animated character that's engaged and entertained your child.

Do screens damage young kids' visual development?

We don't yet know the long-term impact of kids being introduced to screens at a young age. There's some preliminary research that suggests that screen use may be associated with myopia (near-sightedness) because of the displacement effect. Basically, if our kids are spending excessive amounts of time with digital devices, they're not getting enough natural sunlight which their developing eyes need for healthy visual development. We're also worried that young kids can become conditioned at looking at small screens close distance which may also contribute to visual impairment.

Until we have a more complete picture (pardon the pun) I suggest that parents and professionals limit young kids' screen time, balance their 'screen time' with their 'green time' (so they can get plenty of natural light) and foster healthy screen habits from the start (encouraging kids to take plenty of breaks away from the screen, blinking more when looking at screens).

Is it safe for my child to use headphones?

Most commercial earbud style headphones can reach 130dB, yet safe levels for kids are less than 75dB. And we all know many kids turn headphones up to their maximum level!

To protect kids' hearing, I suggest parents and professionals only ever use noise-cancelling, earmuff style headphones, limit kids' use of headphones to no more than 60 minutes/day and go to the device's settings and set the maximum volume level.

Do I need to worry about WiFi exposure and my child?

There's scientific uncertainty when it comes to kids and WiFi. In some regards, we're conducting a living experiment. We don't yet have conclusive scientific evidence to say that WiFi is safe for kids. We also don't have evidence yet to show that it's harmful for kids (I certainly wouldn't be volunteering my kids to participate in any research studies that evaluates the safety of WiFi). So as cautious Kristy and given the research that I've read, I advise parents and professionals to err on the side of caution. We need to adopt the precautionary principle with kids and minimise their exposure to WiFi where possible.

Here are some simple things you can do to minimise young kids' exposure to WiFi:

// limit WiFi exposure – minimise children's exposure to WiFi and mobile devices. Turn off routers when not required (i.e. overnight or during the day if we're at home or school and they're not being used). Switch mobile and touch-screen devices to airplane mode when children are playing them and keep modems away from high-traffic areas of homes (or classrooms) for example, out of bedrooms or sleeping areas.

// establish tech-free zones – don't have WiFi enabled devices in bedrooms or other areas where children spend a high percentage of their time.

// increase the distance between children and the device – use headsets or earphones when speaking on mobile phones. Keep devices at least 40 cm away from the body (remember smartphones are still emitting electromagnetic radiation when they're switched on aren't being used). Encourage children to use the speaker option when using smart phones rather than placing them to their head.

// wire up when possible – find the ethernet cable (that's the blue cable we probably threw out when we got WiFi) and hardwire devices whenever possible. Connect printers and gaming consoles using a cable (and not WiFi).

// limit time on devices with poor reception – who's done the phone dance trying to pick up a better signal? Our device has to work harder and needs to emit higher levels of EMR when it's operating with a weak signal. So send an SMS or avoid using it when there's poor reception.

Section 6- How our screen habits impact on our kids

Is it okay to post images or videos of my kids on social media?

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**

Parents of 2-3 year olds should start asking for their child's consent before they post anything of their child online. This subtly teaches your child about basic online etiquette and about the importance of being responsible for the images shared online.

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. 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. 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 an occasional 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.

BEST TECH TIPS FOR PARENTS OF 2-5 YEAR OLDS:

- Techno-tantrums are normal and can usually be attributed to the neurobiological changes that technology causes . Remember, set firm guidelines about 'how much' screen time your child can have each day, give two gentle reminders before switching off, use a timer, encourage your child to switch off the device (not you) and enforce consequences for not adhering to screen rules.
- Avoid using screens as 'digital pacifier' all the time (but don't feel guilty if you need to do it every now and then).
- Switch off the TV when no one is watching it as background TV can impede their language skills and alter parent-child interactions.
- Keep bedrooms, meal areas, cars (for short trips), play areas and bathrooms as tech-free zones.
- When selecting apps for preschoolers, look for apps that encourage your child to create content (e.g. create a digital book) and communicate (e.g. read a book app and record your child's voice), in addition to consumption apps (e.g. watching You Tube).
- Scary content, including the daily news and current affairs programs should be avoided when pre-schoolers are around. They don't yet have the cognitive or emotional skills to process them.
- Set up parental controls on devices, but be aware that you need to maintain an active presence and supervise your child's online habits. You wouldn't let them play in the playground by themselves, so don't let them roam online, unsupervised.
- Install Internet-filtering tools on all Internet-connected devices.

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.