

# Alternatives to Screen Time For Children 0 to 2 Years of Age

We all wonder about the role screens should play in the lives of babies and toddlers. Children today are born into a digital world where screens are the norm.

Early brain learning is easier for children and more efficient when they interact in real time with real live people.

Screens will not help your child learn more or get ready for school faster. In many cases the screens may actually harm your child's brain health and ability to learn.



## So what is a parent to do...?

- 1 . No screen time for children under 2 years of age.
- 2 . Limit parent and caregiver screen time when you are with children.
- 3 . Make meals, bedtime, bedrooms and vehicles screen free zones.
- 4 . It's OK to use Video Chats (e.g. Facetime) to interact with far-away friends and family

**Alternatives to screen time for babies and toddlers:** for those times when you just need a little break, check out non-screen activities to distract and engage your child in meaningful play.

## When doing chores, including meal prep:

- Set your baby on their tummy on the floor, add a few toys, keep baby close to you.
- Put an 'almost sitting' baby in a laundry basket near you, add a soft toy for baby to chew on.
- Keep board or bathtub books in the kitchen. Ask your baby or toddler to find things you know are in the books, "can you find the red dog, the train, the apple?"
- Download some children's music on your phone, set up a small speaker. Sing along with songs like "the wheels on the bus, itsy bitsy spider or Mr. Sun" or find new songs you enjoy.
- Set up a spot with simple kitchen items that are baby safe. A pot with a lid, a wooden spoon, a plastic bowl, a funnel, a plastic cup, etc. Have a small healthy snack ready for when you get home. Let your child help get it ready.



**“The greatest invention in the world is the mind of a child!”**

Albert Einstein

### When waiting for an appointment or at a restaurant:



- Ask your baby or toddler to show you things in the room that you are in, “can you find the light in the ceiling, the window, the red chair?” If they are walking and space allows, ask them to go to different parts of the room.
- Bring along a search and find book or a new book from the library to engage your child’s brain.
- If there is room, play “walk like a…” penguin, fox, turtle, cow, snake, cat, bunny, frog, etc.
- Watch for signs that your baby or toddler is hungry. Have a small snack ready.
- Sing simple songs like “Old Macdonald had a farm”, make up new verses
- Bring along a few special toys or activities that are just for “waiting”, a special book, a stacking toy, a small puzzle, an erasable drawing board, a squeezey ball.
- Video chat with a grandparent or friend.

### In the car:

- Bring board or bathtub books that can’t be ripped, ask your child to find things that you know are in the book. “Can you find the worm, the butterfly, the apple?”
- Use your radio or downloaded music to calm or distract your baby or toddler. Sing along with the music.
- Keep a few special toys just for the car. Tell a story about the toy; “Thomas the train is going to the city, what is he going to do there?”
- Make a brain builder by putting small items, like feathers, beads, marbles, jingle bells, plastic snakes or bugs into a clean, dry water bottle and filling it half full with rice. Remember to seal it shut. Find the different items by turning the bottle.
- Keep a blanket or soft toy in the car for cuddling.
- Look for toys that have snaps, zippers, buckles, things that open, go inside, stack, move or bend as these will engage your toddler’s brain and distract him from his car ride.



Visit The Foothills Children’s Wellness Network [www.foothillsnetwork.ca](http://www.foothillsnetwork.ca) to learn more about member agencies who can provide information and support in making good screen choices for your family or email [FCWN.coordinator@ahs.ca](mailto:FCWN.coordinator@ahs.ca) to connect with a real live person.