2026 UPDATE

Screen Use in the Early Years



Guidance for Children 0–5 and Early Years Settings in England

It's not just about the minutes... it's about HOW, WHY and IN WHAT CONTEXT screens are being used.

UNDER 2s



The guidance recommends avoiding screen time altogether, except in exceptional circumstances such as video calls.

2–5 YEARS



Try to keep screen time to no more than 1 hour a day – and less if possible.

Avoid screens at mealtimes and in the hour before bedtime.

SCREEN TIME vs SCREEN USE

SCREEN TIME is how long a child spends looking at a screen.

SCREEN USE is how, why and in what context the screen is being used.





THIS INCLUDES...

- The quality & pace of content
- The purpose
- How engaged the child is
- Whether an adult is interacting
- How it supports learning

FOR EARLY YEARS SETTINGS

Screen use should be:

- LIMITED
- CAREFULLY PLANNED
- PURPOSEFUL

It should have a clear learning and development aim.

From 1 September 2026, Early Years providers must have regard to the screen-use guidance for Early Years settings.



WHAT SHOULD SCREENS NOT REPLACE?

Screens should not replace the rich experiences children need.



Talking & interaction · Stories & books · Imaginative play · Creativity · Exploration · Physical activity · Outdoor play · Relationships · Sleep & rest

The guidance specifically says screens should not replace high-quality educator-child interactions.

CONTENT MATTERS

If a screen is used, choose content that is:

- Age appropriate
- Slow-paced
- Predictable
- Repetitive where appropriate
- Advert-free
- Free from scrolling & autoplay
- Checked by an adult first

AVOID content that is:

- Fast-paced & over-stimulating
- Lots of rapid cuts & movement
- Flashing images
- Fast-talking characters
- Overlapping music & dialogue
- Complex plots
- Algorithm-driven content

Apps aren't automatically educational or safe just because they are for kids.



HOW SCREENS SHOULD BE USED

- Use in short stints
- Use together with an adult
- Talk about what you see
- Interact, predict & respond
- On purpose with a clear aim
- Then switch it off!

Avoid using screens to:

- Occupy children
- Manage behaviour
- Calm children
- Fill transitions
- Keep children passively entertained

AI GUIDANCE



The guidance currently recommends avoiding children's use of AI until better evidence is available about its impact on young children.

This includes toys with built-in AI features.

SEND & ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The 1-hour guidance does NOT apply to screen-based assistive technology for children with SEND.

Technology can be essential for:

- Communication
- Wellbeing
- Participation
- Access to learning
- Quality of life



DIGITAL DEVICES IN SETTINGS

- Take photographs of children's learning
- Research a question together
- Support music or movement experiences
- Share digital stories
- Support creativity
- Support communication
- Use assistive technology
- Record assessments



KEEP ACTIVE!

Children aged 1–5 should aim for at least 180 minutes of physical activity across the day.

Every movement counts!



A PRACTITIONER CHECKLIST

- [ ] Is the screen necessary?
- [ ] Could we achieve more through hands-on experiences?
- [ ] Does it extend learning or replace me?
- [ ] Are children actively engaged?
- [ ] Is the content appropriate?
- [ ] What will the children be doing next – away from the screen?



KEY DATES

26 March 2026
New government guidance for parents published

1 September 2026
EYFS framework change: Providers must have regard to the screen-use guidance.