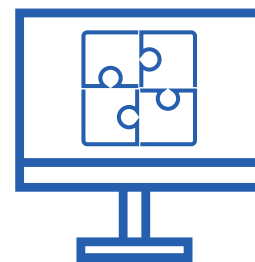


Internet and screen-based activities and play... finding a balance



Most families want to find a reasonable balance between time spent on screens and time for other types of play and activities, including family time.

If you have access to screens at home during the coronavirus pandemic, they can be a way for your child to:

- keep in touch with friends, social groups and family
- share experiences, concerns and ideas
- have a laugh and enjoy themselves
- get absorbed in a game that takes their full attention
- take part in creative activities
- access information, news and advice.

It's understandable to relax some of the usual rules in the current crisis. But spending all day on screens can have negative effects, as well as providing your child with important opportunities and experiences. For example, your child may find it difficult to get to sleep, or they may miss out on other activities.

Some ways to help your child find a healthy balance

- **Show you understand and are interested.** Let them know you understand that playing on screens isn't all good or bad. You could try playing some of their games, or get them to teach you about apps they like.
- **Keep moving.** Encourage your child to take regular breaks, rather than sitting still or lying down for too long. They can walk around, and do star jumps or press-ups to increase their heart rate.
- **Get outside.** If possible, encourage them to get some outside exercise.
- **Look out of the window.** It's good for your child's eyes to change focus by looking at the horizon or distant buildings.
- **Try keeping your mealtimes screen-free.** You'll have time to talk and appreciate your food.
- **Try to avoid screens before bedtime.** This will make it easier to fall asleep, and to get up in the morning.
- **Plan together.** Discuss with your child how long they feel it's ok to use screens each day. Get them to make a plan, and ask what would help them stick to it.
- **Try to avoid repeatedly checking updates on the coronavirus pandemic.** Try making a conscious decision to turn off or mute notifications. And try only checking the news a couple of times a day.
- **Remember.** Older children might enjoy doing things they did when they were younger or playing with favourite old toys. This can give them a sense of reassurance and security.

Babies and very young children

Babies can be attracted to screens. This is especially true if people around them are using screens. But the most important things babies and very young children need for their development don't come from screens. They are about human contact – for example:

- being held, cuddled, tickled and stroked
- gazing around, focusing their eyes on different shapes, faces and distances
- people making eye contact with them and smiling
- touching things with their hands, feet, mouths and bodies
- people talking to them using baby talk, rhymes and lullabies.



STAY EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY



STAY PHYSICALLY ACTIVE



RELAX AND FORGET ABOUT WORRIES



MAKE SENSE OF NEW EXPERIENCES AND CHANGES IN THE WORLD



COPE WITH FEELINGS THAT ARE DIFFICULT OR FRIGHTENING

The *IPA play in crisis* series is designed to offer straightforward advice and suggestions to help you and your child keep playing through the coronavirus pandemic.