

# The 5 Cs of Media Use



CENTER OF EXCELLENCE  
Social Media and  
Youth Mental Health

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

## TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOLERS: 2 TO 4 YEARS

From ages 2 to 4 years, toddlers are learning A LOT, becoming more talkative, wanting to master new things by themselves, and can finally understand some educational content on media. This is also a time of big emotions and learning how to manage them. These are the important developmental tasks that media shouldn't crowd out.

### ASK YOURSELF THE 5 Cs

### WHAT YOU CAN DO

#### **Child**

*Who is your child, how do they react to media, and what are their motivations for using it?*

At this age, you start to see differences in toddlers' personalities—some being very impulsive and curious—others being shy and slow to warm up. Some toddlers are obsessed with media and demand it frequently, others have an easier time letting it go. Knowing how your child reacts to media helps you develop healthy boundaries around it.

#### **Content**

*What is worth their attention?*

Research shows that educational programs like PBS KIDS shows, Sesame Street, Blue's Clues, or Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood can teach toddlers facts, healthy behaviors, and how to manage emotions. Try to work these high-quality shows into your child's viewing. Although your toddler may like media such as YouTube with cartoons or influencers, try to keep that to a minimum—it may have a lot of marketing or poor role modeling. If your child watches YouTube, make a playlist of high-quality videos for them. Remember to turn off autoplay (so the algorithm doesn't decide what they watch next!) AVOID: Apps/video games with aggressive content or in-app purchases.

#### **Calm**

*How do they calm emotions or go to sleep?*

Hello, big tantrums! This is a crucial age for helping young children know their emotions and figure out how to manage them! The best way to do this is to: 1) try to stay calm yourself, 2) label what emotion you think they're feeling ("It's okay to feel sad/angry/frustrated"), and 3) help them calm down. It can be hard, but these are great opportunities for learning, so try not to distract them with a device any time they're upset or bored. Keep screens for regular times of day or when you're on a long car/bus/plane ride. Set calming bedtime routines that involve reading and snuggling. Point out to your child when you are doing 'calm' activities—role modeling really matters.

#### **Crowding Out**

*What does media get in the way of?*

At this age, screens may crowd out playing, moving their body, running around outside, exploring nature, looking at books, and chatting with siblings and parents. All of these activities teach social and brain skills that help set toddlers up for success in preschool and kindergarten. Set aside a little time each day to play, read, or get outside with your young child. AVOID: Letting your child have open-access to a tablet or phone.

#### **Communication**

*How can you talk about media to raise a smart and responsible child?*

Toddlers and preschoolers understand a lot more of our language, so this is a good time to talk to them about what they see in videos, 'good' and 'bad' behavior in characters, or advertisements. If your child is watching something interesting, talk about it. Do something related to the show or movie with your child.

## Family Media Plan

As parents of toddlers and preschoolers, the Family Media Plan serves as a valuable resource as you evaluate the quality of content consumed by your child. Key considerations at this stage include fostering diverse interests beyond media, finding calming techniques without relying on media, and ensuring that content stays positive and educational for your children.



Make a Media Plan  
for the whole family  
(parents too!).



## About Us

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health is dedicated to creating a healthy digital ecosystem for children and adolescents. Social media use starts during childhood and can play a significant role in the relationships and experiences that affect children and teens' growth, development, and mental health. The Center provides resources and tools for parents, clinicians, teachers, and youth to learn how to better navigate social media and the online world.

Visit [aap.org/SocialMedia](https://aap.org/SocialMedia) for more information and resources.

### We're here to help.

Explore our Q&A portal for answers to your questions about social media and youth mental health.



The 5 Cs were inspired and built upon the work of journalist & author of books about media and children, [Lisa Guernsey](#). The Three Cs were first described in the book *Into the Minds of Babes* (2007) and then *Screen Time* (2012) and *Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens* (2015).

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