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Replace screen time for children under 2 with activities that spark imagination

Ari Brown

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AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Replace screen time for children under 2 with activities that spark imagination

While playing with your child is beneficial, you cannot do this every moment of the day. Instead of turning on a TV program or video so you can make dinner or take a shower, let your baby or young child play independently.

Your child benefits from playing alone for short periods of time. He learns to problem solve, think creatively and use his imagination. The American Academy of Pediatrics supports unstructured playtime for children of all ages.

Here are some ideas for simple, inexpensive activities that your infant or young child can do without your participation. As your baby starts to crawl, remember to use a portable play yard or safety gates to keep your child in a safe area if you are distracted. And make sure all toys are impossible to swallow or chew.

Sensory activities

- For young infants, offer items like colorful or high-contrast toys or mobiles to look at or follow with their eyes.
- Let your baby listen to music. Let your older baby or young child play with rattles or child-friendly music boxes.
- Offer safe objects or toys with different textures.
- Offer large plastic, wood or plush toys without small removable pieces to grab, manipulate and mouth.

Cognitive/language

- Let your baby explore cardboard books that are bite- and rip-proof.
- Offer “cause and effect” toys. Let your baby figure out how to make an object light up, make noise or move.
- Toys that can be filled and dumped also are popular with young children.



Social

- Let your baby play with a plastic mirror.
- Offer pretend food, picnic ware, teacups, a grocery cart, baby doll or baby carriage to children over age 1.
- Let your child participate in activities of daily living. While you are cooking, let your baby “cook” on the floor with pots and pans.

Large and small muscles

- Infants as young as 3 months can play with an activity gym to bat/grab objects.
- Offer measuring cups, plastic food containers, pots, pans and wooden spatulas.
- Give your older baby a big ball to roll, kick or throw.
- Stacking cups or “nesting cups” are good for using small muscles and figuring out how to stack. Shape sorters are another toy that encourages eye-hand coordination.

— Ari Brown, M.D., FAAP

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