



## NEWS TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR BABY FROM BIRTH TO AGE 3

### Being on and around digital devices can interfere with your baby's development

Like you, all parents hope their children will grow and thrive to their best potential.

The first three years are vital for your baby's brain, which is developing more rapidly than at any other time in life. For their brains to develop in a healthy way, babies need to use all their senses to explore their world and have caring relationships with you and other caregivers. How the brain develops in the first years sets the foundation for your child's overall health and well-being.

Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships are crucial for babies, who need supportive "serve-and-return" interactions with you and other caregivers. It's like playing ball. The baby "serves" through coos, cries, smiles, and facial expressions. You "return the serve" with soothing words, smiles, and gentle touch. Seeing your face and hearing your voice helps your baby feel safe and secure.

Being a parent is joyful and fulfilling, but can feel overwhelming, too. Sometimes we turn to a digital device as a way to take a break. We may provide our children with devices thinking it might encourage learning, or simply to calm or entertain them. **But new research shows that being on or around devices a lot can have the exact opposite effect. It can disrupt their emotional, physical, and brain development.** Digital device use by babies, toddlers, and their caregivers—whether TV, smartphone, laptop, tablet, or AI product—can also interfere with relationship-building, which is so important.

*"The screens almost made it feel like, instead of living and enjoying the day, it felt like I was just getting through the day. I feel so empowered now that I've done it— [parenting] without screens— and I know I can do it. I feel like endless possibilities. With screens not being an option, it really frees you from that crutch."*

-from a mother who weaned her 18-month-old from screen dependency by stopping the child's digital device exposure and greatly increasing his non-tech play and interaction with people.

Research shows that children from birth to age 3 who have regular and prolonged exposure to screen-based devices may have:

- Trouble learning words and how to speak.
- Differences in how their brains form and operate.
- Problems with caregiver relationships and in other social settings.
- Tantrums, hyperactivity, and other difficulties managing emotions.
- Over- or under-sensitivity to sound, light, and other aspects of their environment.
- Poor coordination and difficulty with fine motor tasks.
- Higher likelihood of autism symptoms or diagnosis by age 3.
- Trouble falling asleep and staying asleep.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

- ✓ Babies learn the most about how to talk between birth and age 1— before they say their first word!
- ✓ Infants can feel upset and confused when your face is blocked by a phone.
- ✓ Babies naturally learn really well from you and other people but not from digital devices.
- ✓ Programs for little ones may use design techniques that make it difficult for the children to stop viewing.
- ✓ Having the TV on, even when no one is watching, distracts babies from their play. You also won't talk and engage as much. They need to hear your words to learn how to talk!
- ✓ There isn't enough known yet about whether babies and little children can safely use AI products. There are also concerns that placing an infant into an AI-enabled product, such as a smart bassinet, can reduce the soothing your baby needs directly from you.

## It's YOU that YOUR BABY NEEDS RIGHT NOW



- ♥ Talk with and respond to your baby. Describe what you do together. They may not use words to talk back yet, but they are always learning from you.
- ♥ When you and your baby are together, silence your digital device and put it aside, including during baths, play, feeding, and diapering.
- ♥ Provide playtime indoors and outdoors, where your baby can use all their senses, explore their world, and develop core strength.
- ♥ Help your baby have fun and build skills by giving them non-electronic and non-tech things to play with such as containers and lids, pots and spoons, balls, and blocks. They also use their imagination with dolls, fabric pieces, empty boxes, water, sand, mud, and modeling clay.
- ♥ Read books together every day. It's great cuddle time and prepares your little one to be a good reader and student.
- ♥ It's OK for you and your baby to have brief video chats with faraway loved ones.
- ♥ Avoid using a screen to quiet your child, even during tantrums. It makes it harder for them to manage their own emotions and could become a habit.
- ♥ Have times and places in your home that are TV-and device-free, such as at mealtimes and in bedrooms.
- ♥ Children 5 and under aren't developmentally ready to have their own digital device. You are in charge of any device you decide your child can use.
- ♥ Your little one will not miss out on learning opportunities if you wait to give them a digital device until they are older.
- ♥ Choose nurseries, early education settings and preschools that don't allow TVs or other digital devices around children.
- ♥ Tell your partner, babysitter, relatives, nurseries and daycares how your baby's brain is being built through talking, playing, singing and reading—and by keeping digital devices off and aside.
- ♥ You are a role model. Be mindful of your own digital device use.
- ♥ Get help if you feel depressed, anxious, or overwhelmed.
- ♥ Have fun with your precious little one!

### GUIDE FOR YOUR BABY'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

#### Birth to age 3:

Children this age need to spend full time interacting with caring people, using their senses to explore their world, and having lots of play and movement.

Brief video calls attended by caregivers are OK. Otherwise, child's interaction with digital devices should be avoided.

Keep the TV off and minimize caregiver device use and audible notifications when child is present.

#### Age 3 to 6:

To build skills and for their physical and mental health, children this age still need days filled with play and conversation.

If you choose to allow your child to use a digital device, it should total no more than one hour in a day and doesn't have to be every day.

Media content should be slow-paced, age-appropriate, non-violent, and ideally experienced and discussed with an attentive adult.

***See resources, research and more at [MyBabyGains.org](https://www.MyBabyGains.org)***