



# Starting Strong Connection

## Media Influences and the Young Child

The explosion of media influences—children's TV show, DVDs, video games and computers—is such a recent phenomenon that we have had little scientific data on its effects on young children until recently. Now the evidence is beginning to tickle in. Studies are backing up what many educators have long believed—that young children are spending far too much time in front of screens. This is upsetting everything from language development to healthy nutrition and motor-skill development.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children three to six years olds be limited to no more than two hours of screen time of all types per day. Children two and under should not watch TV at all!

Studies show that babies and toddlers learn best when they interact with family members, teachers and other significant people in their lives—not from TB, videos, or DVDs. Bonding with an adult facilitates learning, especially for children two and under. For these children, watching DVDs that claim to create baby geniuses may actually end up delaying speech. TV also cuts into creative playtime, which is essential for children's intellectual and social development. Children need to touch things, move them around, and figure out how they work.

They need to use their hands and exercise their brains. This is how children learn to think, reason and solve problems; develop fine and gross motor skills; and discover how to entertain themselves. Too much TB can also intensify attention problems, which are more prevalent in boys than girls.

Video games are everywhere and parents often look at them as pacifiers or behavior-control tools for children. But as families are finding out, it can be difficult to pry children away. Power struggles and tantrums are difficult enough to handle at this age. These devices add to the problem. They turn on the reward systems in children's brains. Playing video games activates children's brains to release dopamine—a chemical triggered when something pleasurable happens. The more a child plays the game, the more stimulated his

brain becomes and the more dopamine released. When this happens, the parts of the cerebral cortex that control judgment and decision making shut down. Boys are especially vulnerable. They get caught up in the competitive, aggressive and often violent nature of the games. Game play uses only a small portion of the brain, which means other parts are not being stimulated and this impairs brain development. If lopsided development occurs in the brain, the following problems are likely to occur:

- Shortened attention span
- Reduced critical thinking
- Reduced creativity and imagination
- Reversed ability to be internally motivated
- Cognitive desensitization (aggression)
- Visual deficits (depth perception, near-sightedness)

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# The Journey of Mixed Emotions— How to Use Positive Language to Improve Your Child's Behavior

"Stop it," "No", "Don't do that!" As a parent, you might find yourself using these words and phrases more often when your child begins to make his own choices. Now, stop for a moment and consider how the conversation might feel if you couldn't use these

words? What if, rather than telling your child what he can't do, you instead chose words to tell him what he can do? While this shift in language might seem small, it actually provides a powerful positive change to the tone of the conversation. How can such a small change make such a big difference? While it is



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obvious to adults, young children are not able to make the logical connections that when they are told not to do something, what they actually should do is the opposite. For example, the directions, "Don't climb on the counter: can be very confusing to a child. However, "Please keep your feet on the floor" tells the child exactly what the expectation is and how he can change what he is doing. When you are specific in your directions by telling your child exactly what he can do and when, it is easier for him to comply and he is more likely to cooperate with request.

## Try This at Home—When teaching your child independence in self-help routines

- **Replace "don't" with "do".** Tell your child what she can do! If you saw her cutting the leaves of a plant, rather than saying, "Don't Cut that!" you could say, "Scissors are for cutting paper or playdough. Which one do you want to cut?" It is more likely that your child will make an appropriate choice when you help her to understand exactly what appropriate options are available.
- **Offer a choice.** When you provide your child with a choice of things that he can do, wear or go, he is more likely to select one of the options your have offered because it makes him feel like he is in control. This strategy also works for you as a parent because you approve of either choice.
- **Tell your child "when."** When your child asks to do something, rather than saying no, acknowledge her wish and tell her when she might be able to dot it. This answer feels more like a "yes" to a child. For example, if your child asks to go to the park, but you are on the computer, you could say, "The park sounds like a great idea! I need to finish this letter first right now. Would you like to go after your nap today or tomorrow morning after breakfast?"
- **Use "first-then" language.** Another way to tell a child when he can do something in a positive way is to use a "first-then" statement. For example, if he wants to watch TV but you would like him to pick up his toys, you could say, "First, pick up your toys and then you may watch TV."

## The Bottom Line

Positive relationships with parents, teachers and other caregivers provide the foundation for a successful and happy child, are the building blocks for your child's self-esteem and ability to empathize and predict future positive behavior choices. The manner in which you talk to your child has a significant impact on his behavior. Making positive changes to your communication style can be hard work, but with a little practice, you will see a big difference in your relationship with your child. Your child will feel more encouraged, positive and independent and, as a result, you will enjoy better overall cooperation.





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Children who start early,  
Start Strong.



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## Summer Safety

### Sun Protection

- Avoid sun exposure during peak sun hours (10 AM - 6 PM).
- Wear protective clothing and a wide brimmed hat and sunglasses (with 99-100% UV protection).
- Sunscreen is a must (on sunny and cloudy days)! Look for products with UVA and UVB protection and an SPF of at least 15 (according to the American Academy of Pediatrics and American Association of Dermatology).
- Sunscreen should be applied liberally 30 minutes before going out in the sun, and reapplied every two hours or sooner if swimming, sweating or toweling off.  
Look for shade whenever possible.

### Dehydration and Heat-Related Illnesses

- Keeping well hydrated is very important.
  - Children (and adults) must remember to drink.
  - Do not wait until a child says he is thirsty before offering fluids. At this point, he is already dehydrated, so be sure to provide plenty of fluids before going outside, while out in the heat and afterwards.
  - Playing in the hot summer sun means lots of fluid losses, so avoid strenuous activity during peak sun hours (10 am- 6 pm). Look for shade and take lots of breaks.
  - Seek medical attention immediately for any signs of heat-related illness.
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