# Creating a balance between ‘Family Time’ and ‘Screen Time’

**Screen time is a way to relax. How can you balance your child’s use of technology with access to family time and interaction?**

While screen time may be a way for many to relax, a recent survey of Welsh parents with children aged under five found that their child’s use of technology was one of their top concerns. So, how can you balance your child’s use of technology with access to family time and interaction?

Screen time, refers to time spent in front of a screen watching television, playing on a computer, tablet or smartphone.

### Screen time guidelines

No-one is able to single-handedly entertain a young child all day or keep up with their energy levels! Often parents will see technology as a way to offer children ‘down time’ or ‘quiet time’ so that they focus on a household task. However experts recommend limiting young children’s daily screen time. This is because of the potential impacts on their physical health, particularly their vision and posture and also their language and social skills. They recommend:

* infants aged 18 months and younger should not be exposed to any digital media
* for children aged two to five years of age, screen time should be limited to one hour per day
* children of any age (and grown ups!) should avoid screen time before bed as the light emitted can make it harder to fall asleep.

Distraction is a successful parenting technique to help a child move on, and this can be achieved by engaging them in other types of play or activities, not only with a tablet or television.

Getting the most out of technology:

In the same way that we involve ourselves in other play, parents can involve themselves in their child’s use of technology, sharing time together, setting limits and role modelling how and when it is used.

* **Think about on-line safety** - reduce risks by taking some precautions like checking the privacy settings on apps that your child uses.
* **Act as a role model** - It is easy to forget the frequency with which we check our phones but our children could be mirroring our behaviour. Try to create a place in your home to keep mobile phones and only choose to get it if you need to use it purposefully.
* **Think about posture** - Try to make sure your little ones are not straining their necks looking down at a tablet. Try to encourage them to look at the screen on a table and to take regular breaks to look away from the screen. You could put a sticker on a wall of their favourite character and ask them to look at the sticker every now and again.
* **Enjoy together** - the best way for a child to develop their language skills is by listening to ‘live language’ from the real people around them. Try to sit with your child when they play on their tablet and talk to them about what they can see and what’s happening.
* **Use technology to increase physical activity** - there are many resources such as checklists and scavenger hunts that can be downloaded from apps and websites. You could talk to your child about the activity that they would like to do and then set off outdoors to find the items on the list.

### Choosing apps

There are plenty of apps and games available for all ages. Try to choose age appropriate apps or games that your child will enjoy. Choose apps that will help them learn something, for example apps that encourage:

* creativity (e.g. drawing pictures, creating stories)
* problem-solving (e.g. asking children to match objects by shape or colour)
* language development (e.g.  learning their first Welsh words)
* social skills (e.g. taking turns in games)
* positive messages about relationships, family and life – avoid those that are violent or have gender or racial stereotyping.