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Advancing family identity for children through kinship care worldwide

Kinship International Network

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FIRST SCREEN TIME GUIDELINES RELEASED BY WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION: NO TV UNDER TWO

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For the first time, the World Health Organisation has released guidelines on screen time, physical activity and sleep for children under five, saying it's time to bring back a focus on playing. Amongst the recommendations, no screen time for toddlers and 1 hour maximum restrained in a pram.

The new guidelines were developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in a move to help parents around the world raise healthy, active children.

They include looking at how much time children spend active and playing, how much quality sleep they get, and how much "sedentary screen time" they have – in other words time spent sitting down watching a screen, whether that be the TV, a tablet, or playing computer games.

There are conflicting views amongst health professionals about whether screen time is in fact harmful for children. But the new screen time guidelines are less about how much time children spend glued to a tablet, but more about how much time they're spending inactive, instead of out exploring the world and learning through play.

"What we really need to do is bring back play for children," says Dr Juana Willumsen, WHO focal point for childhood obesity and physical activity.

"This is about making the shift from sedentary time to playtime, while protecting sleep."

"Early childhood is a period of rapid development and a time when family lifestyle patterns can be adapted to boost health gains," says WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.



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HOW MUCH SCREEN TIME IS OK FOR TODDLERS? THE WHO RECOMMENDS:

0 to 2 years old – no screen time recommended

2 to 4 years old – no more than 1 hour sedentary screen time

HOW MUCH PLAY AND EXERCISE DO YOUNG CHILDREN NEED? THE WHO RECOMMENDS:

0 to 2 years old – be physically active multiple times per day, particularly through interactive floor play. For babies unable to crawl, this includes 30 minutes tummy time, spread throughout the day.

Babies shouldn't be restrained for more than an hour at a time, including in a pram or high chair.

3 to 4 years old – spend at least 3 hours a day engaging in a range of different physical activities, with at least one of those hours spent doing moderate to vigorous physical activity. Not to be restrained for more than an hour at a time.



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HOW MUCH SLEEP DO YOUNG CHILDREN NEED? THE WHO RECOMMENDS:

0 to 3 months old – 14 to 17 hours of good quality sleep, including naps

4 to 11 months old – 12 to 16 hours of good quality sleep, including naps

1 to 2 years old – 11 to 14 hours of good quality sleep, including naps, with regular sleep and wake up times

3 to 4 years old – 10 to 13 hours of good quality sleep, which may include a nap, with regular sleep and wake up times.

Bupa's Psychological Health and Safety Leader, Chanel Nesci has welcomed the clear guidelines.

"It can be overwhelming for parents to know whether they are doing the right thing by their children when it comes to their health and wellbeing, as well as juggle the demands of our daily lives. The new recommendations released by the WHO are clearly outlined and easy to follow and we should try to incorporate these into the everyday lives of our children," she says.

"We also need to remember that, as parents, if we are consciously trying to provide our kids with safe and secure environments which promote social interaction, physical activity, and a variety of fun learning opportunities, while leading by example as much as possible, we are doing a great job."

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– Bupa's Psychological Health and Safety Leader, Chanel Nesci



Make regular technology-free time part of your family's schedule

Tips to limit screen time for young children:

- Create interactive play spaces in and out of the home. Outdoor ideas include a sandpit, water play stations (must be closely supervised) or balls to chase, indoor ideas include building blocks, play kitchens, drawing stations and balancing board
- Make regular technology-free time part of your family's schedule.
- Avoid letting your toddler see you staring at your screen, they are at an age where they love to mimic and learn from your actions.
- For older children watching television, choose one program for them to watch and make sure they know at the start that the screen is being switched off once it's over. Stay strong and be consistent so that they know there's no room for negotiation.
- Don't be afraid to let children be bored. This is how they learn to be creative and to make their own fun.
- Set a "no phones at the table" rule for everyone at meal times.
- Avoid screen time in the hour before bed to help children sleep.

