

Education experts give tips on apps for your kids

December 23 2013, by Marie Sutton



Kids these days have a penchant for high-tech and would rather play with smartphones and tablets than board games and building blocks.

And they start younger and younger. A whopping 83 percent of children age 6 and younger use some form of screen media, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Although [screen time](#) has been linked with diminished creativity, childhood obesity, sleep disturbance and the like, it doesn't all have to be negative, said University of Alabama at Birmingham education experts.

"When used appropriately, technology and media can enhance children's cognitive and social abilities," said Jennifer Summerlin, an instructor in the UAB School of Education. "Interactions should be playful and support creativity, exploration and authentic learning."

Summerlin offers some tips and to help ensure children make the most of their screen time:

- **Have a plan:** When choosing media for your child, be informed and intentional and make appropriate choices. It should be appropriate for their age, individual nature, cultural upbringing and linguistic abilities.
- **Make sure their brain is put to work:** Select apps that are active, hands-on, engaging, empowering and give the child control.
- **Enable fun:** Be sure to provide your child with any accessories needed to make the device easy to use.
- **Don't let the app be the sole teacher:** Let the device be one of many other options to support learning.

UAB instructor and elementary school teacher Allison Hodges, Ph.D., recommends these applications for toddlers and preschool-age children:

- [Peekaboo Barn](#) introduces children to animal names using the familiar peek-a-boo game.
- [I Hear Ewe](#) is a library of animals, modes of transportation and their sounds.
- [Starfall ABC's](#) is an alphabet-teaching app that works well.
- [AlphaTots](#) is an excellent tool for helping children learn the alphabet.
- [ABC Alphabet Phonics](#) helps children learn their ABCs by sight, sound and touch.
- [Elmo Loves 123's](#) is designed to teach preschoolers numbers from one to 20.

- [Starfall Learn to Read](#) teaches kids the basics of reading.
- [Teach Me Toddler](#) drills kids on letters, numbers, shapes, coloring and counting.

Hodges suggests these applications for elementary school-age children:

- [Toontastic](#) allows children to create amazing multi-scene cartoons with musical scores.
- [ABCmouse.com](#) lets [children](#) explore the habitats of various animals.
- [Stack the States](#) makes learning the 50 states fun.
- [Marble Math Junior](#) uses fun mazes to teach kids to solve math problems.
- [Marble Math](#), based on the Common Core Curriculum, is an engaging way to learn mental math.
- [Numbers League](#) lets kids practice basic math facts while helping superheroes fight evil villains.
- [Questimate!](#) is a math-estimation game that directly involves kids in making word problems with just enough guidance to keep the problems relevant and challenging.

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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