

# Did Your Children Receive Tech Gifts? What to Keep in Mind As They Play

[naeyc.org/resources/blog/tech-gifts-what-keep-mind-they-play](https://naeyc.org/resources/blog/tech-gifts-what-keep-mind-they-play)



As tablets, smart phones, and large screen televisions connected to the internet transform households across the county, these devices become part of family gift giving. And whether someone purchased a technology related gift for your child or your child used a tablet that was a gift for you, it's important to think about the quality of the content your children will interact with while using screen media as well as how much time you want your children to spend using tech toys and tools.

Here are some things to keep in mind when using or selecting tech related gifts for young kids:

**Good tech toys match children's stage of development and for babies that means not using screens as a babysitter.**

The first years of a child's life are critical for that child's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. So much of how children this age learn is through responsive interactions with others and physical exploration of how their bodies move. Babies and toddlers are learning how to move their bodies, make sounds, make sense of the world, and communicate. Technology and screen media can support but not replace those interactions. Think about reading e-books together, looking at family photos and video chatting with relatives, playing games together and talking about real world experiences that connect to the screen games you play. Avoid content and gadgets that set up infants and toddlers for being on their own with a device. Having recently moved across the country and away from family, one of my kids' favorite activities is to Facetime with their cousins and grandparents in Arizona.

**Choose games and tools that enhance preschooler's and kindergartener's**

## **real world experiences.**

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Preschoolers and kindergarteners are developing a sense of initiative and creativity. They are curious about the world around them and create and communicate using a variety of materials (crayons, felt-tip markers, paints and other art materials, blocks, dolls, dress up clothing, miniature animals). Screen media is one more outlet for them to express their creativity and explore learning. Think about games and tools that allow your child to explore an interest (like animals), make connections to the non digital world and learn about the world (like monitoring bird migration or the weather), create something new (like a tool for musical exploration) and tell stories using photos and words (with a storytelling tool or app). Also look for media and tools that allows children to work together with friends and siblings.

## **Apps can be fun and also support children's learning**

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With so many apps on the market it can be hard to know what's good for young kids. There are some general guidelines families can think about when selecting apps. Does the app connect with your child's real world interests? Can your child navigate easily and get out of whatever she has gotten into? If your child creates something, can she save her work? And remember, If choosing an app for an infant or toddler make sure it's something you or another adult will use with them.

The good news is that a number of early childhood organizations have created guides to help families as they think about and select apps.

## **Remember how important real world experiences are for young children and think about your family's desired media diet**

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Kids need to move their bodies to grow and develop. They build fine motor skills through activities where they use their hands like squeezing play dough, cutting with scissors and doing puzzles. And kids also need plenty of physical exercise every day. Think of tech toys as just one part of the many interesting fun and engaging toys and tools your child will play with and learn from. One phrase that's starting to take hold to describe the need to balance the use of screen media with other activities is the term media diet. How will your young child use screen media and other tech toys and also have plenty of time for reading books, hands on art materials, playing outside and socializing with friends? What's your families media diet? Is it where you want it to be or do you want to shift things? My husband and I spend a lot of our parenting time thinking about how our kids' experiences support their optimal development. Technology and media are a part of their experience--but not the only part. It is our responsibility to create a balance of experiences that support all aspects of their growth and development.