

Screen Time and Digital Media Policy

Purpose

At Little Steps Day Care, we recognise that young children are growing up in a digital world. We use digital technology carefully and intentionally where it can enhance children's learning and development.

Our approach follows the Department for Education (DfE) guidance on screen use in early years settings and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) requirement for providers to have regard to this guidance. The DfE advises that screen use should be limited, carefully planned and clearly linked to specific learning and development aims.

Our priority is always to provide children with rich opportunities for:

- face-to-face interaction with adults and other children
- active and physical play
- outdoor learning
- creative and imaginative play
- books and storytelling
- communication and language development
- hands-on exploration and real-world experiences.

Screen use will never replace these experiences.

Our approach to screen time

We take a precautionary and purposeful approach to screen use.

The DfE guidance states that:

- children under 2 years should avoid screen time, other than in exceptional circumstances such as a video call with parents or carers
- for children aged 2 to 5 years, screen time should be limited to up to one hour per day, and less if possible
- screen use should take place for short periods and should not displace sleep, physical activity, play, story time or interaction with adults and other children
- children should not use screens passively or without adult co-engagement.

At Little Steps Day Care, our actual use of screens will always be considerably less than the maximum daily guidance and will only take place when there is a clear educational purpose.

We will never use screens simply to occupy children, manage behaviour, calm children or fill transition periods.

Approved digital content

To ensure that children's digital experiences are safe, age-appropriate and consistent across the setting, the only online video and digital media sources used with children are:

1. Twinkl Original stories
2. CBeebies educational videos

Staff will not introduce other online videos, streaming services, social media content, YouTube videos, short-form videos, apps or other digital media for children without prior approval from the setting's leadership team.

All content will be checked by the leadership team before it is shown to children.

The DfE advises that digital content used with young children should be age appropriate, slow-paced, repetitive and predictable, and should be free from advertising, scrolling and autoplay.

Where content is accessed online, staff will ensure that children are not given independent access to the wider internet or video platforms.

Adult supervision and co-engagement

Children will never be left to use a screen independently.

An adult will be present and actively engaged with children during screen use. Staff will:

- talk to children about what they are seeing
- ask questions and encourage children to predict, recall and respond
- introduce vocabulary
- make connections between the screen content and children's real-life experiences
- encourage children to move, sing, communicate and participate where appropriate
- stop the activity when the learning opportunity has been achieved.

Screen use will be an interactive shared experience, rather than children passively watching a screen.

When screens may be used

Screens may be used for specific educational purposes, for example:

- sharing a carefully selected Twinkl Original story
- watching a short CBeebies educational video linked to children's current topic of learning
- supporting a particular area of learning or interest
- introducing a song, rhyme, movement activity or topic
- extending children's understanding of experiences that cannot easily be provided directly.

Staff will consider whether a screen is actually necessary before using one. Where the same learning objective can be achieved through a book, real-life experience, conversation, practical activity or adult-led interaction, the screen-free option will be used.

Screen-free times and spaces

Screens will never be used:

- during mealtimes
- immediately before sleep or rest periods
- as background entertainment
- to occupy children while staff undertake other tasks
- as a reward or punishment
- as a behaviour-management tool
- as a routine part of transitions
- as a substitute for adult interaction, stories, books, play or physical activity.

The DfE specifically advises settings not to have screens running in the background and recommends avoiding screen use during mealtimes and within an hour of a sleep period.

The setting will maintain appropriate screen-free areas and periods to support social interaction, communication and active play.

Under-2s

In line with DfE guidance, we do not routinely provide screen time for children under the age of 2.

Exceptional circumstances may include activities such as a video call with a parent or carer, where appropriate.

Screen-based assistive technology required to support a child with SEND is considered separately and is not subject to the same screen-time limits.

Children aged 2–5

For children aged 2–5, screen use will be:

- limited and carefully planned
- delivered in short periods
- linked to a clear educational purpose
- supervised by an adult
- interactive rather than passive

- balanced with substantial opportunities for physical activity, outdoor play, communication, social interaction and practical learning.

The DfE recommends keeping screen time for children aged 2–5 to no more than one hour a day, and less if possible.

The setting will consider children's overall experiences and avoid unnecessary cumulative screen exposure across the day.

Safeguarding and online safety

Staff are responsible for ensuring that children are protected from inappropriate digital content.

Before using digital content, staff will consider:

- whether it is suitable for the children's age and stage of development
- whether it is directly relevant to the intended learning
- whether it is slow-paced and appropriately stimulating
- whether it contains advertising or unsuitable material
- whether links, recommendations, scrolling or autoplay could expose children to other content
- whether the activity creates any safeguarding or privacy concerns.

Children will not be permitted to browse websites or video platforms independently.

Staff will follow the setting's safeguarding, online safety and data protection policies when using digital devices.

SEND and individual needs

We recognise that some children with SEND may benefit from digital or screen-based assistive technology, including technology that supports communication, participation, independence or wellbeing.

Such use will be considered on an individual basis and in partnership with parents/carers and relevant professionals where appropriate.

The DfE confirms that the recommended screen-time limits do not apply in the same way to screen-based assistive technologies for children with SEND.

Staff responsibilities

All staff will:

- follow this policy consistently
- use only approved digital content
- check content before showing it to children

- ensure screen use has a clear educational purpose
- actively co-engage with children
- keep screen sessions short
- prevent children from accessing unsuitable content
- ensure screen use does not replace high-quality adult interaction or active learning
- report any concerns about inappropriate content or digital use to the leadership team.

Partnership with parents and carers

We will make parents and carers aware of our approach to screen use.

We will encourage families to talk with us about children's screen use and share appropriate information about healthy screen habits.

Our approach is supportive and non-judgemental. We recognise that children's experiences at home will vary and that families may face different circumstances.

Monitoring and review

The setting leader will monitor the use of screens to ensure that:

- this policy is being followed
- only approved content is used
- screen use remains limited and purposeful
- children are actively engaged with an adult
- screen use does not displace high-quality play, learning and interaction.

This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if DfE guidance or the EYFS statutory framework changes.