



**TURN OFF,
SWITCH
TO PLAY**

Criterion 5

Screen time (television/DVD/computers/electronic games/tablets) is not used or is limited in the service consistent with Australia's 24 Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years (Birth to 5 Years).

To meet this criterion include the following in your service's practice and policy:

- Exclude all screen-based activities.

OR all three below

- Exclude screen-based activities for children under two years of age.
- Have limited screen-based activities – less than one hour per day for children aged two to five years, that are planned, for a minimal amount of time and are age appropriate.
- Educators/staff/family/adults always sit with children to monitor what is being watched and respond appropriately to the content and children's reactions.

AND

- Screen-based activities are not used as a reward, incentive or for comfort.
- Infants, toddlers and pre-schoolers are not kept sedentary, restrained or inactive for more than one hour at a time – except when sleeping.

Quick tip: It is OK to copy and paste the above dot points into your policy if it is happening in practice.



Add your 'Turn Off Switch to Play' progress sticker to your Member Certificate when all relevant parts of this criterion are happening in practice and written into policy.

Why is this criterion important?

Screen watching (tablets, smartphones, television, DVDs, videos, computer games) by young children for entertainment reduces the time available for active play and limits children's social interaction with family and friends.¹

Physical activity (active play) helps children develop social, emotional, cognitive, physical skills and confidence.¹

Active play benefits children by:

- increasing balance, agility, flexibility, coordination and cardio-vascular health
- increasing fine and gross motor skills
- promoting bone health
- providing opportunities to make friends
- supporting good mental health²
- contributing to an energy balance assisting in weight management
- learning to cooperate, share, problem solve and resolve conflict

- practising nurturance, guidance and other pro-social behaviours
- acting out skills and situations for life-developing communication skills.

Reasons for action:

- Tasmanian's aged 2-4 years spent an average of 77 minutes/day on sedentary screen-based activity. ³
 - 50% of toddlers and preschoolers use screen-based devices on their own without supervision and the majority of parents of young children report using screens to occupy their kids so they can get things done. ⁴
 - Screen-based activities for children less than two years of age do not lead to any health, intellectual or language improvements.⁵
 - Too much screen time has been linked to mental health problems, including anxiety and depression. ⁶
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Australian Recommendations advise:

- Australia's 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years (birth to 5 years) recommend that children under the age of two years do not watch television or use other electronic media.
 - Children aged 2-5 years should be limited to less than one hour per day watching television/screens or using electronic media.
 - Infants, toddlers and pre-school aged children should not be kept sedentary, restrained or inactive for more than one hour at a time – except when sleeping.¹
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Tips and strategies

Under 2's and older children at your service

- Exclude screen watching for children under two years old and promote activities which develop movement skills and creativity instead.
 - For older children, limit screen time and only watch shows that are educational and promote cooperation, imaginative play, respect for others, and show a diversity of gender roles and culture. Setting a definite time limit to screen watching might mean half an hour or less per day – for example the length of Play School or The Wiggles.
 - Educators/family members should always sit with children to monitor what is being watched and respond to the content and to the children's reactions.
 - Use television or tablets for a particular part of the program rather than have it on all day in the background.
 - Children of any age enjoy moving their bodies to music, so include dancing to music regularly in the program. You can use music or musical instruments from a diverse range of cultural groups to provide a particular rhythm. You might provide lengths of material of scarves for children to use in dance.
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Other alternatives

- Consider other ways to interact, encourage and stimulate young children rather than putting them in front of the television, a tablet or DVD. If children need to be calmed down, try some relaxation activities such as yoga, reading a story or playing a quiet game, or be outside playing active games. Share ideas with educators, support staff and families.
- Think about having a television-free week or day four times in the year. This can be undertaken by the service and the families to promote the importance of other activities in children's lives.

Overcoming potential barriers

Families may feel their child is learning by sitting in front of a screen:

- Remind families that children learn far more from social interaction and play.
- Suggest screen time be limited to short periods of time, and mixed with some active play.
- Provide families with [information](#) about how much time children are sitting at screen-based activities and the issues associated with this.

Families may feel that screen time gives their children down time:

- Suggest alternatives such as reading, listening to recorded stories or exploring the natural world outside.

Families may not be sure how to encourage children to turn off screen-based activities and do something more energetic:

- Services could set up a display with [posters](#) and [handouts](#) in the foyer with ideas of fun things to do that are not screen-based and give parents and other family members a chance to add to the list.
- Encourage families to be selective about their children's screen viewing habits and electronic games. Suggest keeping screens out of bedrooms and not having the television on all day in the background (particularly during meal times).
- Encourage families to have rules about screen time and provide them with tips and ideas from the website.

Activities

Celebrate screen-free days

What better day than the first day of every season for a screen-free day? Children can think about the types of play and activities for the season, what outdoor clothes or protection they will need and reflect on setting limits on screen time.

- Spring – promote a screen-free day for families during the first week of September.
- Summer – focus on SunSmart protection – sunscreen, sunglasses and shade.
- Autumn – this time is great for raking leaves, jumping over leaf piles, throwing leaves in the air, swishing through the piles.
- Winter – what clothes will keep children dry when they play outdoors in winter? Where can they go and be active on winter weekends in their local neighbourhood? What indoor activities can they do when it gets dark early?

Playbook or calendar

Create a playbook or calendar as a useful resource for educators, support staff, families and children. Add some photos and include a range of activities for different weather conditions, weekends, holidays and celebrations. Educators, children and families could develop a book of games and other active play ideas that can be used with the children. This can help if it is a rainy day or at other times when you need some ideas.

Success stories

No screen policy

A Community Child Care Centre in the Derwent Valley has a no-screen time policy. Educators at the centre say that it was a bit of a change to the children who were used to watching 30 minutes of TV a day while in care. The centre has managed this change by providing more story time and dancing and movement activities, which children really enjoy.

At St Mary's Child Care Centre screen time is substituted with other alternative quiet time activities including books, craft or puzzles. The centre borrows a DVD player two or three times per year to watch short movies that are based upon what is happening in the program or special events such as Christmas.

Screen time alternatives

At St Mary's Child Care Centre there is also a media policy which states that all materials for publications and for viewing/listening by children in care will be assessed for suitability and that parent permission will be sought for PG rated material. The centre's procedure is to avoid screen time where possible.

Where to go next



Website

The following sections of *Move Well Eat Well* website can help provide support and useful tools to help you with the 'Turn Off Switch to Play' message and criteria:

- [Turn Off Switch to Play 'Early Childhood Services' section](#)
- [Turn Off Switch to Play 'Families' section](#)

References

1. Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (2017). Australian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years (birth to 5 years): An Integration of Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour, and Sleep.
2. XiuYun Wu PhD, Kerry Bastian PhD, Arto Ohinmaa PhD and Paul Veugelers PhD *Annals of Epidemiology*, 2018-02-01, Volume 28, Issue 2, Pages 86-94.
3. The Australian Health Survey, National Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey, Table 22.1, 2011-12.
4. Rhodes, A. Screen time and kids: What's happening in our homes? Australian Child Health Poll, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, June 2017.
5. Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (2009). *Get Up & Grow Healthy Eating and Physical Activity for Early Childhood*, Family Book. Australia.
6. Domingues-Montanari, Sophie(2017), Clinical and psychological effects of excessive screen time on children *Journal of Paediatric and Child Health* - Volume53, Issue4, April 2017, Pages 333-338.
7. Hinkley T, Salmon J, Okely A, Trost S (2010). Correlates of sedentary behaviours in preschool children: a review. *International Journal of Nutrition and Physical Activity* 7:66.