

#MediaMentors: Selecting And Curating Apps For Young Children

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The adults in young children's lives play important roles as media mentors and curators of the technology tools young children use to learn, to play, to seek answers to their inquiry and curiosity and to make with. As the American Academy of Pediatrics and other organizations call on adults to focus on selecting quality technology and media for young children over keeping track of screentime it may leave many of us wondering how to select and curate apps on tablets and smartphones.

"Developmentally appropriate teaching practices must always guide the selection of any classroom materials, including technology and interactive media. Teachers must take the time to evaluate and select technology and media for the classroom, carefully observe children's use of the materials to identify opportunities and problems, and then make appropriate adaptations."

– NAEYC/Fred Rogers Center joint position statement on Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs

As the TEC Center and the NAEYC/Fred Roger Center joint position statement on Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs turns 5, we have learned some important lessons from research and our own experiences about how to appropriately curate the apps that young children are using:

- 1. Reduce the clutter. Less is More.** A screen filled with many app choices can be visually overwhelming for young children. If you have previously introduced a child to a tablet or smartphone and let the child explore all of the possibilities of a touchscreen interface and you still notice a child "hopping" around between apps and unable to stay inside an app you might consider deleting some of the apps or moving just one or two apps to a different page.
 - Media Mentor Moment:
 - Gail Lovely, co-author of *Suddenly It Clicks!* offers the same tip many parents use for young children and birthday parties. Put the same number of apps on a device as the age of the child. This will allow a child not be overwhelmed by choices and to master how to use an app without other digital distractions.
 - If you are using an Apple or Android device, don't fret as an app can easily be taken off and added back onto a device. It is not gone forever. Just do a search online using the name of your device and "removing apps without losing them forever". You can also consider moving one or two apps to a different page on your device to reduce visual stimulation and "app hopping."
 - How to move an app to a different page on an Apple device or an Android device.
 - Consider making an app calendar with the app icons on a certain day of the week or month in Choiceworks Calendar or a paper calendar (consider cutting out the picture of the app icon and gluing it on) for young children so they know when you will be switching out the apps on a device. Together you can pick what app to explore next and give a child a sense of choice and control with appropriate support from an adult.
- 2. Consider the 3 Cs and your goals for the child(ren).** You know your child or the children you serve best. Think about **Lisa Gurnsey's 3 Cs**: Individual Child, Content, and Context before you purchase an app.
 - Media Mentor Moment:
 - Ask the child and yourself why you are interested in purchasing an app and consider if the goal and the app are developmentally appropriate.



3. Check out several app reviews for one app. The same app is not always the best app in the eyes of the beholder because we each bring our own lens, needs, and experiences as we evaluate them. Check out reviews from several perspectives including educators, child development experts, privacy experts and inclusive design experts.

- Media Mentor Moment:
 - TEC Center is deeply committed to supporting the development of apps that use Universal Design for Learning principles and include:
 - images and sounds of children and families from different cultural backgrounds
 - that are considerate of gender stereotypes
 - feature children and adults who have different abilities
 - If you don't see an app or ebook that represents your child or the children you serve:
 - email the developer or leave a review in the app store as many developers do not have child development expertise but make changes as consumers request changes
 - consider making your own ebooks, video and other media that reflect the positive contributions of children and families from a variety of cultures and have a variety of abilities

"They must be willing to learn about and become familiar with new technologies as they are introduced and be intentional in the choices they make, including ensuring that content is developmentally appropriate and that it communicates anti-bias messages. When selecting technology and media for children, teachers should not depend on unverifiable claims included in a product's marketing material."

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4. Play with media mentors before you purchase. Many libraries have tablets in their children's area. We love visiting our local library to play with apps with our librarian before we make a purchase. We also enjoy checking the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC)'s blog posts for updates on notable children's media.

- Media Mentor Moment:
 - investigate parent and child programming at your local library, such as digital storytimes and classes on how to use the internet to help caregivers learn to use technology tools with their children and learn how to access resources for career development, healthcare and community services that may only be accessible online

5. Observe and play together. Children often need more time and adult facilitation exploring than we realize. Mastering how to use an app takes time and adult support. All of that tapping and clicking a young child does when she first gets an app may seem annoying or make you think the app is inappropriate, but like that first time you got a smartphone, you had to tap and click to learn what it was capable of doing before you could do something meaningful with it such as sending your first text message or taking a 360-degree photo.

- Media Mentor Moment:
 - try using the Digital Play Framework to assess where a child is in her use of different technology tools and what support you can provide her with to go from exploring an app to learning, making and creating with an app.

Still looking for resources to help you select apps for young children? Check out the resources from our September 2017 Apps to Robots webinar series Part 1 and Part 2.

