

The Right Technology for Kids at Every Age

These days, your baby's developmental milestones include technology like cell phones and computers. Find out what gadgets are appropriate for each stage with our digital milestones

By Jeana Lee Tahnk of Screen Play (http://www.parenting.com/blogs/children-and-technology-blog)

4 TO 5 YEARS: The World Wide Wanderer

- 1. Uses the Internet under supervision
- 2. Plays active video games with the family
- 3. Time to create a new definition of "screen time"

Besides all the giggles sites like Nick Jr. and PBS Kids Sprout can provide, exposure to computers is important for preschoolers because they're playing an increasingly prominent role in education. (When it comes to apples in the classroom, the iMac has replaced the Granny Smith.)

But we can't forget that "the Internet has countless dark alleys that you don't want your child stumbling upon," explains Jerry Weichman, Ph.D., a licensed clinical psychologist at the Hoag Neurosciences Institute, in Newport Beach, CA.

The key here is supervision. Whether it's playing Jake's Jungle Groove on the Disney Junior website or watching that amazing octopus video on YouTube (search "invisible octopus"), do it together. Forget about tracking software: You are the most effective monitoring device.

A few new physical milestones (mastery of running and kicking, and bending over without falling) combined with the social ability to take turns means he's ready for active video games on the Wii or Xbox 360. But video games should be a family bonding experience. Forty-five percent of moms report that they play games together as a family on a videogame console, according to a recent Parenting-BlogHer survey. So treat it as a family activity.

Some of the best all-ages games on the Wii are Just Dance Kids and Epic Mickey (splash color on a monochromatic landscape to bring it to life). If you're not sure about a game's content, use the Entertainment Software Rating Board app (free; itunes.com). Snap a photo of the game box or enter the game's title, and you'll score all the information you need. Keep in mind that your child's exposure to the digital world compounds as he gets older, so count time spent on all devices toward his daily allotted screen time.