Technology as a Tool in Early Education
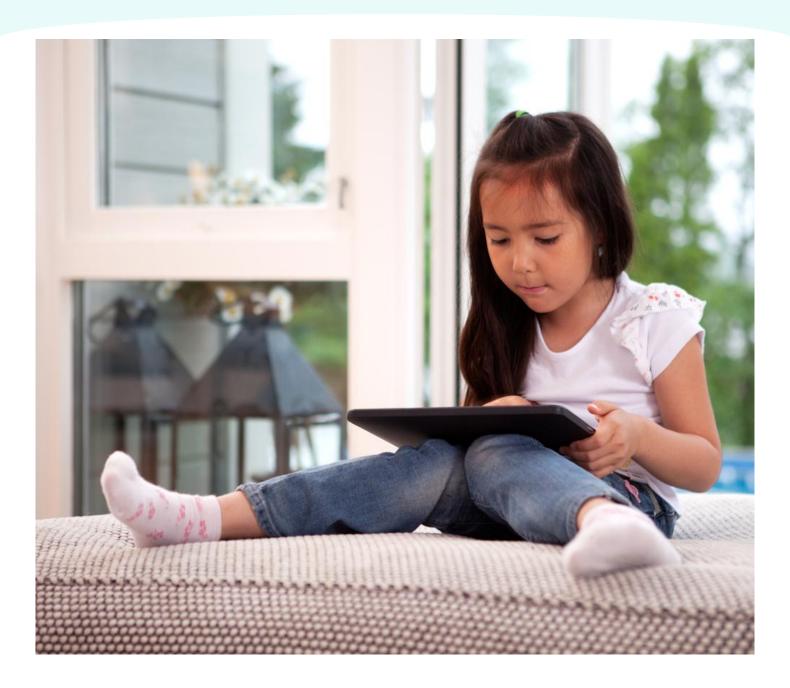
Since the dawn of TV, parents, educators, and doctors alike have debated whether or not the technology is harmful or helpful to children and their early development. With so many newer forms of technology available today, there's no doubt that there are concerns regarding how newer forms of media may effect children. Since smartphones and tablets have just begun to revolutionize the technology industry over the past decade, there hasn't been enough time to gauge the how these devices effect early learning education the long-term. However, when used appropriately, it is becoming clear that newer forms of technology can be used as invaluable tools to aid in early learning.

Technology as a Tool, Not a Babysitter

Like many products today, what you get out of it depends on how you use it. One reason why TV gets a negative rap from many parents and doctors is because of the way parents sometimes use TV: to keep kids quiet. It is argued that some parents will turn on the TV to get peace and quiet while they tend to other activities, knowing that TV will keep the kids busy. Technology like smartphones and tablets can benefit a child's early learning if it's used as a tool, and not just as a way to keep children occupied. Kids can play educational games or videos that help them:

- Practice problem-solving skills
- Develop emerging literacy skills
- Practice math skills
- Learn digital literacy skills
- Practice hand-eye coordination skills
- Increase phonological awareness
- Learn more about the world around them

When parents use carefully selected apps and programs, technology is being used as a tool, and not merely as a means to keep a child busy. Further, parents can limit the amount of time a child is interacting with the media, to allow for a variety of activities during the course of a day.

Interactive Screens Are Best

While the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has made recommendations regarding screen time for little ones, not all screens are the same. A child mindlessly watching cartoons is vastly different from a child playing interactive educational games on a smartphone or tablet. To help your child get the most value from technology, be sure to

choose games, apps, and videos that are interactive. Children will only be able to practice building critical skills if they have the ability to make choices and utilize problem solving skills while interacting with media. Look for games, apps, and videos that engage your children and motivate them to continue learning.

Appropriate Use of Interactive Media Can Mean Big Gains in Learning

School districts across the country are constantly updating their curriculums with increasingly rigorous standards and goals. In today's educational landscape, children are expected to know more entering kindergarten than they were in the past. Thankfully, interactive media such as smartphone apps and games can help aid in the endeavor to learn more, earlier. These games in particular can help build literacy skills, which can help promote school readiness. While children interact with smartphone or tablet apps, they are exposed to a wider range of sounds and vocabulary. This in turn can translate into bigger gains in phonological awareness, improving children's language recognition skills.

Technology Isn't Going Away

For naysayers who don't yet believe that technology can be beneficial to a child's early learning education, one strong argument for introducing certain technology to children is the fact that technology is here to stay. We live in an incredibly connected world, and technology will become a huge part of our children's lives whether we like it or not. Introducing kids to technology is so important because they will undoubtedly need to build digital literacy skills and learn to become a citizen in our increasingly digital age.

When used appropriately and deliberately, technology such as smartphones and tablets can open a world of educational opportunities to enhance our little one's education. As long as we use interactive media as one of the many tools in our educational toolbox, we can ensure that kids will be ready for school and primed for learning.