









Computers: Are They Good for Young Children?



Computers seem to be everywhere these days! Do they have a place in early childhood programs? Should young children use them at home? At what age can children benefit from using them?

Children under 3 have needs that can't be met by computers. Their time is better spent interacting with adults, other children, and toys. Here are some ways you can make computers assets for children ages 3–5.

-  **Use computers for short periods of time (10–20 minutes).** A long period in front of any screen—a computer, television, or a video game—is time away from other, more valuable activities.
-  **Sit with the child, or encourage children to work in pairs.** Use children's computer time to improve their social and language skills. They can learn rules of fairness, have opportunities to become “experts” with a program or game, and practice taking turns. They may also learn new words as they explain what they are doing and teach others how to use the computer.
-  **Choose software and Web sites that are “open-ended,” age-appropriate, and encourage prosocial values.** Open-ended software that encourages creativity, language skills, early reading skills, and problem solving can benefit 3- to 5-year-olds. Computer games that show killing and destruction as fun or as an acceptable way to solve problems can be harmful. Read reviews of the software or try it out before buying it. Is it suitable for young children?
-  **Extend learning from the computer—at home or in preschool.** Extending learning means that you apply the lessons learned at the computer to other activities. Housekeeping; playing games; identifying shapes, letters, or numbers; or writing and acting out stories are some examples of activities that can help reinforce what children are learning at the computer.
-  **Put the computer in a public area.** Make it part of a learning center, or put it in a playroom or in the kitchen. When the computer is near you, it's easier to see how children are using it. It's also easier to make computer use part of other activities.
-  **Be sure that you know the content of the software or Web site first!** If you are familiar with the software, you will be able to answer questions and suggest activities that reinforce what children are learning on and off the computer.
-  **Monitor children's computer use.** When young children use a computer, an adult should be nearby. Try to avoid telling the children what to do next, but be available to help them figure out what to do.
-  **For related Web resources, see “Computers: Are They Good for Young Children?” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.**

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



29 Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Telephone: 217-333-1386 • Fax: 217-244-7732
Toll-free: 877-275-3227 (Voice/TTY)
Email: iel@uiuc.edu
Internet: <http://illinoisearlylearning.org>

Illinois State Board of Education