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## Managing Technology for Preschoolers

As parents, how many of us can identify with being tempted to switching on the TV or tablet to keep our little ones quiet or to coax them into finishing their meal?

Radhika, mother of 3-year-old Ananya admits that the iPad is their favorite babysitter whether they're dining at restaurants or during their vacations or even after a long day at work.

There is no denying that today even our toddlers have easy and ready access to technology – right from the television, to internet enabled smartphones, video games, tablets, computers – and that they are loving the experience. Almost every child today is born tech-savvy. Parents don't need to try too hard to get their children accustomed to technology. I am baffled yet fascinated when I watch a little child comfortably navigate a smartphone or quickly figure out how to switch on their favorite nurse rhyme on the tablet.

So, I say let's not fight it. Instead let's accept that technology is here to stay. And that our children must use technology. Rather than debate its pros and cons and choose sides, let's learn to adapt and best-manage its presence in our lives. The real questions I would then ask are – how soon, how much, how often and what content.

Since this is still a relatively new phenomenon, research is limited. However, the few studies that have been carried out discourage screen time in toddlers under two, and recommend between one and two hours of daily quality screen time for older children.

Parents complain that while they are all too aware of these guidelines, it's a constant challenge to adhere to them. So, here's a few quick tips –

- Out of sight is out of mind – When our preschoolers won't see the gadgets, it is less likely they will ask for them.
- Lead by Example – Be aware of your own screen usage and make special effort to keep devices out of family time.
- Set the rules, but positively – Simple rules can be defined and enforced positively – Saying "It's TV time" will tell your child, there are times when it's okay to watch TV and at other times it isn't. Or allocating a dedicated gadget space within the home can limit usage to that space alone.
- Choose quality over quantity – Spend the time to research and find child-friendly games or shows that offer imaginative and open-ended experiences.
- Introduce alternatives – Expose your child to enriching books, board games and park visits. Having alternatives will automatically curtail screen time.
- Involve them in your routine – Believe it or not, it is never too soon to involve your child in your chores – they'll be happy to cook and bake with you, fold the laundry and pass things around.

- Involve yourselves in theirs – Read together, tell them stories, play ball with them, build puzzles together, draw with them.

I know all this is easier said than done, but hey it's for our kids. And it's important we take the effort. When they grow into healthy, confident and happy adults, I guarantee it you'll be so proud of yourselves and the feeling of satisfaction will make all the effort worthwhile. Happy Parenting!