



# Baby, can you programme the TV?

Usually this question might be aimed at your husband or partner, but these days, you could just as well be addressing your children.

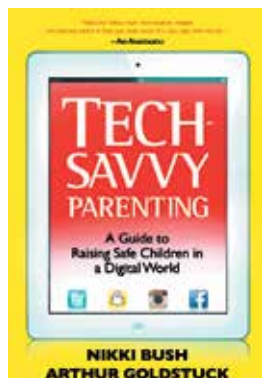
**T**he level of knowledge that our little ones have about technology these days can make any parent feel like a dinosaur at times. As a result, parenting today goes beyond taking care of children physically and emotionally; it has become vital to protect them from the perils that technology brings with it, without restricting their desire to learn and become tech savvy.

In the book, *Tech-Savvy Parenting – A Guide to Raising Safe Children in a Digital World*, by South African authors, Nikki Bush and Arthur Goldstuck, this is precisely the issue that is addressed. Nikki and Arthur, both parents and experts, have put together an enormously

helpful guide to help you bridge the digital divide between you and your children.

*Living and Loving* brings you an extract from the book (published by Bookstorm), in a two-part series: PART 1 deals with tech issues that relate to parenst from birth to two years, and PART 2 will assist you with children aged three to five.

Look out for PART 2 in the next issue of *Living and Loving*.



## PART 1: PRACTICAL PARENTING GUIDELINES,

### 0–2 years

Physically, children in this age bracket are learning how to coordinate various parts of their bodies as well as how to defy gravity, which is a big thing. From birth to age two, the body takes the most phenomenal journey, from the warmth and comfort of the womb to opening up from the foetal position, activating and then shutting down various important reflexes that are part of human development, to learning how to roll over, kneel, crawl, sit, stand and walk. What drives most of this development is a curiosity to explore the

world – to see what's behind the couch, to be able to reach what's on top of the coffee table and to chase a rolling ball.

Emotionally, babies and toddlers are bonding with their parents and caregivers, learning how to trust them. From 18 months of age they embark on the journey to independence by discovering that they are actually separate from their mothers. By the age of two they start to become more social and interact with other children. From birth, children need to hear their parents' voices and we need to talk them clever.

### Things to think about

- How to encourage your children's curiosity in the world around them.
- Creating safe spaces in

which they can move and explore their world.

- Their exposure to real, tactile and multisensory experiences.
- The fact that they are multisensory learners who need more than just a screen.
- Bonding with your child – they need your time, attention and physical presence.

## Questions we are often asked

- Is it okay to give my baby or toddler my cellphone or tablet to play with?
- Will watching educational content on television or my tablet make my little one brighter?
- My child can't fall asleep without my smartphone or tablet in hand. Is that okay?
- The only way I can get my child to eat is in front of a screen of some sort. Is that okay?

## Developmental and media guidelines

- Talk and sing to your child often. We must talk our children clever. The brain loves hearing the human voice, and babies and small children need to see your mouth move so that they can copy it when learning to vocalise and then to speak. The expressions on your face also give them the cues for their own emotional intelligence.
- Read to your baby often, from around six months of age or even earlier.
- Resist the temptation to put them to sleep by allowing them to watch a movie on

your tablet or smartphone. It is easy to do but you are not helping them to develop the life skill of being able to put themselves to sleep. This is called self-regulation.

- Do not feed your child in front of a screen or you will need this as a continued crutch to get them to eat going forward.
- Create a regular routine for sleeping, playing and eating, for example. This is the beginning of discipline and will also keep you sane. Knowing what comes next keeps everyone calm.
- Keep TV watching to a minimum, if at all – it is not helpful for their brain and body development at this stage. It is only useful to you as it distracts your child for a while from needing you or quells their curiosity to explore their physical world, resulting in them sitting still.
- When choosing TV programmes, select ones with songs to learn, actions to copy and content that is calm and appropriate.
- Because your child sees you using a smartphone or tablet, they will want to play with 'your' toys. This is normal but do not give them unlimited access. Use them sparingly for really challenging moments, otherwise it will become a default setting for you both, replacing multisensory learning and quality connection time together.
- Babies need lots of human contact, including cuddling, rocking, touch, hearing your voice and smelling your scent. They cannot get this from a screen. ➔



- Read to toddlers with them on your lap. This provides real, warm, fuzzy connection moments. Encourage reading and a love of books by providing them with a variety of board books, including touch-and-feel ones with different textures, sound buttons and clear pictures.
- They need more laps and fewer apps. This is a good mantra for this age and stage.
- Provide them with plenty of real toys and games that they can explore with all their senses. It is perfectly normal for them to put everything they play with in their mouth first, because this is how they map their world.
- Encourage movement as much as possible because the body is the architect of the brain, wiring it for all future academic and more complex learning later.
- Unplug from your own devices and your busyness regularly to focus on being present with your child. This is challenging but very necessary if your child is to feel important in your life. If they don't, you are in for a nightmare as they create negative attention-seeking strategies and learn how to manipulate you to get your attention.
- Bear in mind that all devices emit some form of radiation, posing a potential health risk from baby monitors and cordless house phones, to your cellphone, computer and tablet.
- Children at this age should be more off-screen than on-screen because the best way to learn about their world is through concrete, physical,

multisensory interaction to help them to make sense of things for themselves.

- Frustration is an important part of learning and it is what galvanises a child to the next level of development. Parents often pass a device to a child who is showing signs of frustration, irritation or is upset. This results in taking away the desire to learn or the opportunity to learn how to resolve their feelings and self-soothe.
- Children at this stage are naturally very busy – and they should be. This is not a problem that needs diagnosis, remediation and medication. Your child is simply suffering from childhood! What they do need is lots of human attention, for both sensory input as well as their own sense of security. What they don't need is to be put in front of a screen to dull their curiosity and their need to move. They need engaging, multisensory life experiences with a parent, caregiver and toys. They also need lots of sleep to temper this.
- If your baby or toddler spends time with a caregiver or relative, make sure that the same media guidelines are used, especially if they are spending the majority of the day with that person. Consistency is very important from an early age when you are trying to establish healthy life skills and media habits.
- With regard to your own media usage, activate privacy settings on social media so that photographs you post of your precious child are only seen by people you choose to show them to.

Parents have so many decisions to make every day that often the decisions about technology take a backseat. However, in terms of your children's safety and development, these decisions are among the most important. Here's what Nikki and Arthur suggest in their book:

### CONVERSATIONS TO HAVE, DECISIONS TO MAKE

- Who is going to be at home with your little one? Mum, Dad, a relative or a caregiver? At this stage of a child's life there is a

strong need for lots of one-on-one attention. Whoever they spend the most time with is the person they bond with most strongly.

- How are you going to handle media in your home? This is as important as what you are going to feed your child and how much sleep they are going to get.
- How you will help your child to develop healthy media habits from a young age, such as not using on-screen media to get your child to eat and sleep. There is a time and place for a screen – be choosy how you use it. **1&1**



COMPILED BY MARION GARASSINO PHOTOGRAPHY GALLO IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK; GALLO IMAGES/THINKSTOCK PHOTOS