



Sparking interest:

**The pros and cons
of using technology
in nurseries**



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Introduction

In an increasingly digital world, it's normal to wonder about the growing role of technology in our little ones' lives – both at home and in their early years care.

As a parent, choosing the best nursery environment for your child is always a top priority, and the increasing presence of technology in childcare settings has become a divisive topic. Some parents believe digital literacy is as important as other key life skills, while others are concerned about the potential risks of introducing children to technology from a young age.

This document explores the positives and negatives of using technology in childcare settings to help you make an informed decision that aligns with your parenting values and what feels right for your family. It covers technology both as a learning tool and a way to strengthen parent communication – and how we can work together to navigate the use of technology in a responsible, safe and engaging way.

70%

of parents think screen use is essential for their children's learning development. However, 47% also expressed concern about the effects of screen use on health.¹

The digital playground

As adults, we're never bored for long. We're constantly connected to the world around us and we have an endless stream of entertainment at our disposal. And, if we find our digital devices captivating, it's safe to assume that our teenagers and children will be drawn to them too.

Indeed, children are now encountering technology at younger ages, and although they might appear to be born screen-savvy, it's a learned skill, just like any other.

It's therefore important to be aware of the impact that tech can have on the next generation of little learners. Technology has been growing its footprint in schools for some time and is becoming more common in early years care too. But is this a good or bad trend?

6 hrs +

The average global internet user now spends 6 hours and 31 minutes online each day.²

Technology in nurseries: the cons

Many recent parents will struggle to recall a time before the internet. But it's important to examine how much technology the next generation is using in their formative years.

Weighing the impact

Over-reliance on screens and digital devices has been linked with development issues such as:

- Sedentary behaviour
- Irregular sleep patterns
- Shorter attention spans
- Hindered emotional development



The core concern is the time taken away from real-world experiences. Children learn best from these experiences and face-to-face interaction. Digital activities can therefore impede social skills, language development, creativity, empathy and opportunities to build relationships.

Attention, attention!

While tablet computers are common tools for giving parents a breather, you should think twice before teeing up your screen for your tiny tech users. Children of nursery age are in the throes of learning how to concentrate and focus, as well as interacting with stimuli and people around them. Believe it or not, they need a bit of boredom. It teaches them how to cope with frustration and harness their imagination and motivation.

Safety concerns

As with all media young children consume, careful monitoring is important to ensure any digital content is age-appropriate and secure. While devices can have restrictions on content, purchases, downloads and privacy set up, it's understandable that some parents can be hesitant about their little ones accessing it without their guidance.

The digital divide

Whichever side of the tech argument you fall on, one thing to consider is accessibility. Not all families have equal access to technology, devices and reliable internet, which could restrict a child's capacity to benefit from tech in their nursery – something worth considering depending on your personal circumstances!

We'll explore the ways technology *can* make education more inclusive in the next section.

1/3

of under-fives own an iPad, using it on average for one hour and twenty minutes per day.³

Technology in nurseries: the pros

Our little ones are naturally curious and will be eager to learn how the progression of technology plays a part in the world they live in. These advances can therefore support key learning objectives (without necessarily involving screen time), as well as facilitate the smooth running of nurseries.

Technology doesn't always mean screen time

The topic of technology can be stimulating for young minds, supporting the educational goals of explanation, experience, discussion and reinforcement. And it doesn't have to involve screen time! For example, nurseries might talk about:

- Microscopes and telescopes
- Transport and traffic lights
- X-rays and how they help poorly people
- Music and speakers
- Photography
- Mobility aids and assisted communication

83%

of parents say it's important to limit a child's screen time.⁴

A world of possibility at their fingertips

For nurseries that *are* open to small amounts of screen time, it can be a tool to support active learning. They could incorporate interactive educational tools into their curriculum – opening the doors to the world!

Examples include:

- Embarking on a virtual field trip to a far away museum or heritage site
- Monitoring the weather forecast and learning about how it's predicted
- Googling the name of a bird you spotted in the nursery garden
- Using a translation app to learn basic greetings in other languages
- Hearing/watching stories from different countries or cultures
- Taking photos of a plant as it grows, to see the progress over time



Creativity and activity

What's more, creating digital art, documenting life through videos or exploring photography and digital storytelling also encourages greater creativity and confidence and can improve hand-eye coordination.

The use of digital resources doesn't have to mean being sedentary, either. Nurseries might encourage children to participate in physical activity and play that incorporates technology, like using the clock app to time a run around the playground or using a music app to explore different genres of music to dance to.

Spotlight on inclusivity

Technology is best when it brings people together – a fact highlighted by the Covid pandemic, when distance learning and virtual communication came to the fore.

This use of technology to increase access to learning opportunities continues to be relevant. Materials now extend far outside books and projectors, allowing children to explore beyond their immediate surroundings. What's more, apps can also cater to different languages and individual learning styles and needs, including support for children with learning difficulties.

79%

of UK parents believe their children's screen time has gone up since the pandemic.⁵

Peace of mind for parents

And beyond learning tools, technology in nurseries can also enhance the experience for you as a parent. Security measures such as CCTV and smart entry systems (such as biometric access) are all benefits of the digital world. Some nurseries also have online training resources for staff.

Technology can strengthen relationships between families and nursery practitioners, too. While there's no replacement for face-to-face communication, there are several digital channels that can keep parents in the loop and encourage engagement, including email newsletters, closed Facebook groups and parent apps.

Such apps encourage nurseries and parents to work together to enhance your child's learning and development. They offer a secure online platform to give real-time updates and record key milestones. They build strong, trusting nursery-parent partnerships by allowing you to be more involved in your child's journey through nursery and work collaboratively to reinforce what they learn in the nursery at home.



Summary: a new age of nursery?

Ultimately, it's up to both parents and childcare providers to take an active role in teaching children how to use technology sensibly and safely, especially when it comes to screen time.

It's clear that a measured, responsible approach to technology can help children thrive in both the real and digital worlds. By having a focus on the learning opportunities technology can provide, carefully balanced with traditional childhood experiences, we can all help the next generation truly flourish in a fast-paced world.

The decision to embrace or limit technology in your child's life – and therefore, your choice of nursery – is a personal one, shaped by your unique values and concerns. Every child is different, and you know them best!

While it's a good plan to choose a nursery that's dedicated to meeting the evolving needs of both parents and children, it's worth having a transparent conversation about the responsible integration of technology with potential nurseries, so you can find an approach that you feel comfortable with and that supports your child's growth in a way that feels right for your family.

Sources:

1 Internet Matters, Look both ways: Practical parenting in the age of screen, 2018.

2 Data Reportal, Digital Around the World, accessed September 2024.

3 Technology and play (TAP), Exploring Play and Creativity in Pre-Schoolers' Use of Apps, Research by the universities of Sheffield and Edinburgh, Montenev Primary School in Sheffield, CBeebies, and children's media industry partners Dubit and Foundling Bird, 2015.

4,5 Survation on behalf of BBC Children's and Education, survey of more than 2,000 parents across the UK, 2023.

