

A Child's Digital Day: A Guide to Technology in Early Learning and Routines



Introduction: Seeing Technology as a Tool

In a world filled with screens, it's easy to feel uncertain about the role technology should play in a young child's life. The purpose of this guide is to demystify this topic by walking you through a day in the life of a child in the early years, showing how digital tools can be thoughtfully integrated to support their development. These are just examples, some of which may resonate with you; however we appreciate that every child, family and setting is unique.

Digital technology can undoubtedly have a negative impact on young children, affecting their development and safety in varied ways. But this is not the case for all uses of digital technology, and we seek to avoid the homogenising and demonising of all technology use.

The core message is simple: ***when used with purpose, technology is a powerful tool for learning, establishing routines, fostering creativity, and providing comfort.***

1. The Morning: Waking Up and Getting Ready



A Gentle Start to the Day

The day begins not with an alarm, but with a visual cue. A **Gro clock** may serve as the child's first positive interaction with technology. By changing its backlight from a calming blue to a cheerful yellow, it visually communicates that it's time to start the day. This can provide a concrete, visual representation of time, which is crucial for pre-literate children who cannot yet read a traditional clock. It can help to develop their sense of sequence and predictability in their daily routine.

Technology in Daily Chores and Self-Care

Even simple household devices become learning opportunities that introduce a child to the technology in their immediate environment.

- **Washing Machine:** Learning to press the 'Start' button introduces the fundamental concept of cause and effect, a cornerstone of early scientific and logical thinking.
- **Electric Toothbrush:** This tool introduces technology as a practical aid for personal health and self-care, establishing positive habits.
- **A tablet with a communication app:** Supporting a child with SEND to learn to communicate their needs and help them familiarise with and participate in their morning routine.

2. On The Move: The Journey to Nursery



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Navigating the World

The journey to nursery presents a valuable opportunity for a balanced approach to technology. The primary focus can be tech-free time, dedicated to conversation and observing the world together. However, a digital tool can be used deliberately to enhance this experience. For example, showing the child the journey's path on a **phone map** can transform a simple trip into a lesson on navigation and spatial awareness. This demonstrates that technology use is a conscious choice, not a default distraction.

Arriving and Energizing

Upon arrival at nursery, technology facilitates a transition from travel to active learning. This may include a tablet to 'sign in' which is a common digital registration tool for many nurseries, a task which children enjoy completing. Other settings have adult-supervised sessions of **'Wake up Shake up' movement songs** (a popular program of guided physical activities) using a speaker (rather than a screen) to guide a fun, physical group activity. This helps children expend energy, connect with their peers, and positively shift their mindset for the day ahead.

This energetic start sets the stage for a day of structured play and discovery.

3. A Day of Play and Discovery: Technology in Nursery



An Overview of Purposeful Technology Integration

Throughout the nursery day, technology is not a free-for-all but is integrated in a guided and purposeful way. Digital tools are selected to support specific learning objectives across various activities, from encouraging creativity and logical thinking to aiding research and managing daily routines.

Tools for Learning and Expression

The following table illustrates how different digital tools are used to achieve specific educational goals. One of the key considerations when using technology to support learning, is the adult’s role in support and scaffolding.

DIGITAL TOOL	ACTIVITY	PRIMARY LEARNING BENEFIT
Camera / Recording Apps	Taking photos of creations made by children on digital portfolio apps used by nurseries and schools for sharing work with families.	Documents creative work and facilitates conversations with adults about their accomplishments. <i>(Note: when capturing a photo for a child’s learning wait until an activity has finished rather than interrupting social interaction or focused activity and play.)</i>

Simple coding toys e.g. Bee-Bot	Guided play with programmable floor robots.	Introduces basic coding concepts like sequencing, estimation, and problem-solving in a tangible, screen-free way, laying the groundwork for computational thinking. <i>(Note: avoid toys with Generative AI capabilities e.g. toys that can talk back and forth with children, due to the lack of guardrails in place and safeguarding risks)</i>
Tablet	Researching topics of interest with adult guidance.	Teaches how to use technology as a tool for inquiry and finding information.
Interactive Whiteboard (IWB)	Participating in a guided 'Dough Disco' session (a fine-motor-skill activity using playdough set to music)	Enhances fine motor skills through a fun, guided, large-group activity.
Educational Game Suite (e.g., Busy Things)	Limited, adult-supported play with curriculum-aligned games.	Reinforces concepts like phonics, numeracy, and problem-solving in a structured digital environment. Activities now include 'Brain break' to reset and recharge. Physical, mindful, and fun/creative activities to suit diverse needs and 'free play' to encourage exploration, creativity, and independent learning
Camera	Taking photos of peers for projects (e.g. expressions, hand washing sequence).	Promotes social-emotional learning and an understanding of processes and sequences.
Digital Timer	Timing getting dressed for PE or tidying up.	Helps children understand the concept of time and manage transitions efficiently.
Speaker / Music Player	Playing calming music or songs without a screen.	Uses audio to manage the classroom atmosphere and mood without visual distraction.

It is also important to recognise that technology's influence appears in offline, imaginative play. When children incorporate props, characters and narratives from digital media into their role-play with friends, they are engaging in a valuable form of creative expression and social development, translating digital consumption into active, collaborative creation.

4. Winding Down: The Journey Home and Evening



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Practical Skills and Family Connections

On the way home, a stop at the supermarket can provide another chance for practical learning. Helping to **scan groceries or weigh loose items** on a digital scale teaches valuable real-world skills, numeracy and how technology functions in everyday commerce.

Back at home, various simple technologies support play and family connection.

1. **Video Calling:** Fosters connection with family members who are far away, strengthening social and emotional bonds.
2. **Walkie Talkies:** Encourages imaginative play and develops communication skills through interactive, screen-free fun.
3. **Oven Timer:** Reinforces the understanding of time, patience, and sequence in a practical home context.
4. **Radio:** Provides screen-free entertainment, offering exposure to a wide variety of music and spoken-word content.

5. The Bedtime Ritual: Technology for Comfort and Calm



Creating a Soothing Atmosphere

A key principle for technology in winding-down routines is the intentional separation of audio and visual stimuli. By leveraging audio-only tools, we can create a calming, predictable atmosphere that soothes the child without the cognitive load and blue-light exposure of a screen. For example, calming music played from a **smart speaker (without a screen)** during bathtime or while settling down, helps signal to the child that it is time to wind down.

Make this the time (and other times in the day, when possible) for you to put down your devices, be a positive role model by being more present, deepen your real-world connections and provide an opportunity to reclaim control over your own focus, sleep and relationships.

Tools for a Good Night's Sleep

Several technologies work together to support a restful night, each serving a specific, comforting purpose.

- **Talking story:** An audio player provides a story, allowing a child to settle down without the need for a physical book or a parent reading aloud.
- **Ewen the Sheep:** This cuddly toy uses white noise, and heartbeat sounds to provide a soothing and familiar comfort object.
- **Smart speaker:** Can be used to play white noise or calming music throughout the night to mask other household sounds.
- **Gro Clock:** The clock that helped the child wake up now switches roles. Its blue backlight and stars serve as a visual countdown to morning, reassuring the child that it is still nighttime.
- **Night light:** Offers a simple, low-tech source of comfort and security in a dark room.

Conclusion: A Balanced Digital Day

The true measure of technology's value in early childhood is not its sophistication, but its purpose. A simple digital timer managing a transition or an audio story calming a child for sleep can be more developmentally powerful than an hour of unguided tablet time. By focusing on technology as a tool to support specific, tangible goals, independence, creativity, connection, and routines - parents and educators can confidently build a healthy and balanced digital ecosystem for the children in their care.

Further support

To support you further with safe use of digital technology please use the following free resources.:

- **For Parents-** parentsafe.lgfl.net
- **For Educators** - eysafe.lgfl.net

The Department for Education's 'Help your Child Stay Safe Online' resources can be found here: <https://kidsonlinesafety.campaign.gov.uk/>

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