



## Internet and . . . Preschoolers

Preschoolers are venturing out of the safety of the home and exploring the “big world.” Today, this means both the physical world and the virtual world, whether it be a fictional urban street on TV or an online kids club. Preschoolers will use every trick in the book to experience these worlds—including picking up anything that isn’t nailed down and putting things in their mouths. This kind of exploration is part of their learning, but they are too young to know what’s safe and what’s not.

### ***What is your role?***

The parent’s role is to encourage and support their preschooler’s explorations, while keeping them safe and healthy. This can range from discouraging their mouthing of dangerous objects to guiding them toward developmentally consistent learning experiences. You can do this by seeing those worlds from your child’s perspective and applying knowledge of their developmental capabilities and needs to each situation.



- **Preschoolers don’t need to go online.** Many parents believe that their children need to explore digital media in order to be ready to compete. But developmental science shows that kids are digital natives and are able to learn everything they need from this environment in a matter of minutes rather than years. So kids of this age should only go online if there are content and activities there that are uniquely optimal for their learning and development at this stage. And remember that they have limited attention spans.
- **Childproof your Internet.** You childproof your home by getting down on your hands and knees and looking at the physical world from a child’s point of view. Do the same with the virtual world of the Internet. An online equivalent of an uncovered socket might be images that scare or confuse them, so think about how to “cover” exposed dangers by making them inaccessible. Most importantly, make it easy to access websites that are designed to optimize their experiences and learning at their current developmental stage—just as you put building blocks on the lowest shelf so your preschooler doesn’t have to teeter on a chair to reach them.

- **Take them to sites that will interest *them*.** Look for things that preschoolers like, such as pictures of wildlife and audio of the sounds they make. Any Internet time with preschoolers should be geared toward them, not toward an older sibling or adult who wants to be entertained while they “co-view” with the preschooler.
- **Use the Internet to stimulate your preschooler’s imagination.** When their content is designed to work with how preschoolers learn, media can support language development and other developmental tasks.

### ***What can you say?***

- **“Just like we go to the playground together, we go online together.”** Make sure that your preschooler goes online only with you—that allows you to guide what he is exposed to and, even more importantly, for you to model controlled, thoughtful media use.
- **“Let’s play this game together. After that, we’ll make a snack.”** Show your preschooler that you use the Internet for a specific purpose and that, when you’re done with that activity, it’s time to move on to something else.
- **“What do you see?”** When using media with your preschooler, observe how she engages with it. Ask her questions about what she sees and thinks so she can practice thinking critically about it.

*This guide was created by Ask the Mediatrician®, a service of the Center on Media and Child Health (CMCH) at Children's Hospital Boston. A non-profit, independent research center, CMCH is dedicated to understanding and responding to the effects of media—tv, movies, music, video games, cell phones, and the internet—on the physical, mental and social health through research, translation, and education. If you have a question about the research behind these guides, go to [www.cmch.tv](http://www.cmch.tv) <<http://www.cmch.tv>>. If you have a question about media and your child’s health, go ahead and ask at it [www.askthemediatrician.org](http://www.askthemediatrician.org) <<http://www.askthemediatrician.org>>. The work of CMCH is made possible by Comcast and other generous donors.*

