

Understanding mobile technology in the Early Years

An information leaflet for Parents and Carers

Introduction

This leaflet has been produced following a project undertaken by 6 Nursery Schools in 2014. The project was established to investigate the place of mobile technology in Early Year's settings. There has been a speedy (some would say too hasty) growth in the use of technology and tablets and smart phones have become a part of many families' lives.

The project involved parents and we take full account of parent views in providing this guidance.

While research in this area is still limited, opinion is divided about the benefits to very young children using tablet technology. Some would maintain that being exposed to digital technology from an early age will help children to be comfortable and familiar, and prepare them better for school. Furthermore, we are living in a digital world and children who do not have access to digital technology could be somewhat disadvantaged. Technology is all around us in the home and in our everyday practices; barring technology at the door of an Early Years setting could create a sense of divide from Home to Nursery.

Others are less sure it is beneficial for young children to use this technology in their pre-school years, maintaining that our children are an inactive generation who already spend too much time watching screens and that any acquisition of digital skills will be out of date by the time these pre-schoolers are teenagers.

The governments public health campaign encourages limiting screen-time whether it is in front of the TV, tablet or computer and replacing this with something active. This is endorsed by NHS Physical activity guidelines for children (under 5 years) on minimising the amount of time children spend sitting watching TV, playing computer games.

Maybe a more sensible way forwards, is to balance the use of technology alongside all other experiences we want children to have as they grow and learn. Teachers and practitioners in Cambridgeshire will always give serious consideration to the place of any new technologies in their nurseries and will look at how technology can support their overall aims.



From top to bottom: Children watching, learning from each other and collaborating with mobile technology in the nursery; captured in the forest school; evidence of mathematical learning; a child's experiment with a camera outdoors.

Why we use iPads and iTouches at Homerton

With the 6 nurseries we explored various tablets and settled on iPads as the ones with the most intuitive use. When mobile technologies are planned for and monitored, they can support children's learning alongside all other experiences at Homerton. There are so many wonderful things to do; jump into a sand pit, pour water through funnels and pipes, listen to stories, play at being a vet or an explorer, build a spaceship, create a model, paint a picture and so on, any technology including iPads just become one more experience in this wealth of opportunities.



Our project observations showed using tablets in a balanced way in amongst this rich provision benefits children's learning. Children were motivated to share; they collaborated together and developed speaking and listening skills as they negotiated and worked things out together, they were able to take their own photos, and videos and share these easily with each other and they used carefully chosen Apps to encourage them in problem solving and early literacy and numeracy.

Early Years settings do not see the iPad as one device per child but as being a collaborative resource with children sharing, taking turns, watching and learning alongside each other. The Apps and activities we choose support the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, they provide excellent opportunities for speaking and listening, turn taking and project based learning.

For some children this technology has been found to be very useful as part of the settling in process and especially with children who are upset when separating from their parents/carers. We found that by videoing the child when settled and busy in their play and learning it helped reassure the parents/carers.

To summarise: we use tablets as a tool to:

- support the settling in process for some children
- encourage speaking and listening, sharing and collaborating
- promote problem solving
- share understanding of the world through specific Apps or carefully chosen websites
- develop mathematical skills and literacy
- encourage mark-making and creative use of art programs
- record experiences through tablet tools e.g. camera, audio
- listen to stories and music
- record our own observations of your children's learning and add these to their Special Books

Safe use of technology

Please see our e-safety policy and Health and Safety policy on our website or in the policy folder in the library.

Safeguarding children comes first and any uses of technology have clear rules in order to keep children safe. A healthy lifestyle is of the utmost importance and staff observe children's play and ensure there is balance e.g. between sitting and moving or between indoor play and outdoors. We support children as they learn how to handle, use and treat mobile devices, not only to avoid slips, trips or falls which may cause damage to the device but to educate them in uses of technology.



Children know where they can find a device and where to return it to, they can help themselves to iPads in their rooms; with staff support this helps them to begin to balance their own uses of technology. We encourage children to use the devices fairly. We use sand timers for turn taking.

We have carefully chosen Apps for our iPads at Homerton, you may like to download the list under the Learning at home page of our website and try these out at home.

Because of the risk about easily accessing inappropriate content, the internet will not be used without close adult supervision. Adults using technology with children will act as good role models and introduce basic e-safety rules.

How you can help at home?

Research 0-8 conducted by Sonia Livingstone and colleagues on behalf of EU Kids Online has identified how important parents are as role models with mobile technology.

Make sure that your child doesn't get hooked and addicted to this technology just because it is there or with you most of the time. While I-spy and endless miles of singing songs and nursery rhymes were once the main methods of occupying the time especially on a long journey, these days the options are much wider. But use of screen based entertainment on journeys or while waiting at the doctors still needs balancing with other activities.

You may like to try using a timer at home for limiting access to screen times. Some children find it hard to move from a tablet or other screen to a new activity. Consider what you are offering as an alternative activity once the tablet is put away or the TV is turned off e.g. "You can have 15 minutes now then we're off to the park". Warning children there will be a change helps e.g. "in 5 minutes it will be time for...". Sticking to the times you set will help children to know this is going to happen, they will learn the rules and the idea is they will learn to give up badgering you! Hiding or deleting a particular app for a time and maybe return to it in a couple of weeks can also help.

One thing is for sure, technology is here to stay so helping our children to understand appropriate uses of technology will help them to make the most of the wonderful opportunities that technology can provide.

If you have any concerns, talk to us! We will do our best to help you.