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#ScreenFreeEarlyYears: Little Minds, Big Futures
A Parent's Guide to Raising Screen-Free Babies

✨ Welcome

Congratulations on your beautiful new baby!

In a world full of screens, choosing a **screen-free start** is a powerful, loving gift you can give your newborn.

These first precious years are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to nurture your baby's brain, deepen your bond, and lay the foundation for their great future!

Waiting is worth it — think – delay screens!

Give your child the best start — for learning, language, and life.

This short guide explains **why waiting is worth it**, and how to do it gently and confidently.

I'm here to walk beside you on that journey — and the science is firmly on your side.

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1. Your Face Is Their First "Screen"

- Babies learn by watching your face: your smiles, your words, your expressions.
- Every coo, giggle, and gaze wires their brain for language, empathy, and connection.
- No app can replace **your face** — it's the most stimulating "technology" a newborn needs.

Simple tip: When feeding or cuddling, keep your phone tucked away. Let your baby's world be filled with your eyes, voice, and love.

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2. The First 1000 Days Shape a Lifetime

- The first three years are a once-in-a-lifetime window for brain development.
- Real-world experiences — being held, hearing songs, touching textures — are **what build strong neural pathways**.
- **Early screen exposure has been linked to speech delays, attention issues, and reduced social skills later on.**

Why a Gentle, Screen-Free Start Matters for Your Baby's Future

In the first two years, your baby's brain is growing faster than it ever will again — and every cuddle, conversation, and playful moment helps build strong foundations for life.

Here's what the research shows:

- Early screen exposure has been linked to slower speech development, shorter attention spans, difficulties with emotional regulation, and lower social skills later on.
- High screen use before age 2 can actually change the structure of a baby's brain, especially in areas needed for language and thinking.
- Screens can crowd out essential experiences like crawling, babbling, playing, and face-to-face connection — all of which are vital for strong, healthy growth.
- Even background TV can significantly reduce the number and quality of words your baby hears — and babies learn language from real voices, not background noise.

- Studies show that more screen time in infancy is linked with more emotional, and behaviour struggles later, including higher anxiety levels in childhood.

The good news?

You don't need fancy apps, baby videos, or flashing lights to help your little one thrive.

Your voice, your smile, your arms, your playful chats — they are the greatest gifts you can give.

💛 Every screen-free cuddle, every babbled conversation, every silly dance is building your baby's brain, heart, and future.

Simple tip: Prioritise real-world play: rattles over videos, peekaboo over cartoons, songs over background TV.

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3. Screens Can Crowd Out Bonding & Sensory Play

- Passive screen time displaces **active learning** — movement, problem-solving, and imaginative play.
- **Babies learn best through real-world experiences** like touch, sounds, and face-to-face interactions. Early screen exposure can interfere with this important sensory development.
- **Babies need time to explore their world** through tummy time, cuddles, and simple activities that encourage motor skills and connection with you.

Simple tip: **Keep a soft play mat or a cosy corner** with baby-safe toys (like rattles, soft books, or textured fabrics) instead of relying on screens. Focus on face-to-face interactions, gentle touches, and responding to their coos and babbles.

Skin-to-Skin Time

Nothing beats the warmth of your skin against your baby's. Skin-to-skin contact in those first hours, days, and even weeks can promote bonding, regulate body temperature, and enhance the emotional connection between you and your baby.

Gentle Baby Massage

Use soft, nurturing touch to bond with your baby. Gentle massages help with relaxation and can strengthen the parent-child connection. Try simple strokes on their arms, legs, and back, always ensuring you follow the baby's cues.

Eye Contact and Smiling

Your baby's brain develops through face-to-face interactions. Hold your baby close, look into their eyes, and smile. The early recognition of facial expressions will help foster trust and attachment.

Cuddling and Holding

Cuddling your baby is one of the simplest yet most powerful bonding activities. Holding them close helps them feel secure, loved, and comforted. Experiment with different holds (cradle hold, babywearing, etc.) to see what works best for you both.

Talking and Singing

Babies are naturally wired to respond to voices. Talk to your baby throughout the day, narrating simple things you're doing, like "Now we're getting your blanket" or "Look at the pretty light outside." Singing lullabies or soft songs also creates a calming atmosphere.

Baby's First Bath

Bath time is a special bonding moment. Gently wash your baby, talking to them softly throughout the process. The warm water and touch can be a relaxing experience for both of you.

Tummy Time

While tummy time helps with physical development, it's also an opportunity for bonding. Lay down with your baby and encourage them to lift their head and push up. Stay close to them, making eye contact and offering smiles of encouragement.

Reading Together

Even at a young age, babies love the sound of their parents' voices. Reading simple, soft books with colourful pictures is a great way to engage and bond with your baby. It also starts building their language skills early.

Soothing Touches (Patting, Rocking, or Swaying)

Gentle movements like swaying or rocking your baby can be incredibly calming and soothing. This rhythmic motion mimics the environment of the womb and helps foster a sense of security.

Responsive Feeding

Whether breastfeeding or bottle-feeding, use feeding time as an opportunity for bonding. Hold your baby close, make eye contact, and offer words of affection while feeding. These moments of nourishment also nurture their emotional development. Put your phone down.

Nappy Changing

Nappy changing time is a perfect moment for eye contact, smiles, and little chats — simple ways to bond and build your baby's brain, without any distractions from a phone.

Explore Sensory Play

Touch, sound, and sight are key senses your baby is developing. Gently exploring different textures (soft toys, fabrics, your skin) can be a great bonding activity. Baby-safe objects with contrasting colours or simple musical instruments (like a soft rattle) will stimulate their senses and allow you to bond through play.

Nature Walks (Babywearing or Stroller)

Take a walk outside in nature with your baby, either by using a carrier or pushing a stroller. Fresh air, nature sounds, and a change of scenery can be soothing for both you and your baby. Talk to them about what you see — leaves, trees, animals — to engage their senses. Put away your phone.

Baby's First Lullaby or Sound

Create a special sound or lullaby just for your baby. This could be a specific song or even a soothing hum or phrase that they come to associate with comfort and security.

Watch Your Baby's Development

Celebrate small milestones together, like when your baby rolls over or starts smiling. Express your joy and excitement, which helps create a loving, encouraging environment for your baby's growth.

Bonding with Siblings or Family Members

If you have other children, involve them in bonding time by encouraging them to talk to, sing to, or gently touch the baby. This can build a strong family connection and foster positive sibling relationships early on.

By focusing on these screen-free activities, you can strengthen the bond with your baby and lay the foundation for a secure, loving relationship throughout their development.

These moments are not just about emotional bonding — they're also vital for your baby's overall growth.

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4. Connection Builds Confidence

- Babies and toddlers thrive on **responsive caregiving** — when you notice their cues and respond.
- Too much screen time can interrupt these natural back-and-forth interactions.

Simple tip: Narrate your day out loud to your baby — "Now we're putting on your socks! One, two!"

Language and laughter are better than any video.

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5. It's Easier to Build Good Habits Early

- It's much easier to **stay screen-light** from the beginning than to cut back later.
- Starting screen-free sets a clear, loving expectation — *in our family, real life comes first*.

Simple tip: Set simple family habits like "No phones at the table" or "Storytime instead of screen time."

Why Screen-Free Early Years Matter

🗣️ **"Babies are wired for connection, not consumption."**

Research shows:

- The brain **triples** in size between birth and age 3 (Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, 2021).
- Up to **90% of a child's brain development** happens in the first five years (First Things First, 2020).
- Babies learn best through **serve-and-return interactions** — when adults respond warmly to their sounds, looks, and actions (Harvard University).

Key facts:

- Screens interrupt natural face-to-face interaction, replacing critical learning moments with passive attention.
- **Early screen use** (under 2 years) has been linked to language delays, shorter attention spans, and lower executive functioning (American Academy of Paediatrics, 2016).
- Even **background TV** can reduce parent–child verbal interactions by up to 95% (Paediatrics Journal, 2008).

Simply put:

- Little eyes need faces, not flashing lights.
- Little ears need voices, not theme tunes.

Your Screen-Free Start Checklist

✅ **Keep feeding, cuddling, and playtimes screen-free.**
✅ **Prioritise real-world toys** over digital entertainment.
✅ **Create "no-phone zones"** like mealtimes and bedrooms.
✅ **Save screens for essentials** like video calls with loved ones.
✅ **Talk with your baby** — narrate daily activities to build language.
✅ **Delay handing over devices** — offer songs, stories, and cuddles instead.
✅ **Model balance** by putting your own device away when you're together.

🧠 Quick Facts for Confidence

- Babies need at least **3 hours a day of active play** for healthy development (World Health Organisation, 2019).
- **Excessive screen time before age 2** has been associated with poorer cognitive outcomes later in childhood (JAMA Paediatrics, 2019).
- Children exposed to high levels of **screen time in early life** show differences in brain white matter, which supports language and literacy (Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, 2019).

✍️ Quotes to Remember

🌼 **The best app is your lap ~ Sue Atkins**

🌼 **Your smile teaches more than any screen ever could.**
🌼 **Connection today builds resilience for tomorrow.**
🌼 **A screen-free start is a strong start.**
🌼 **Little eyes are watching. Little hearts are learning.**

💬 Common Questions Answered

"Aren't educational apps good for babies?"
Not before age 2.
The American Academy of Paediatrics advises avoiding digital media (except video chatting) for babies under 18–24 months because **real-world experiences** build the brain faster and better than digital ones.

"What about video calls with grandparents?"

Video chats with loved ones are **different**!
When you sit with your baby, respond to their cues, and help them interact, video calls can be a **valuable, loving bridge** to family far away.

"Am I being too strict?"

No — you're being mindful.

Small, loving boundaries today build stronger, happier children tomorrow. And don't worry — **flexibility and grace** are part of the journey too.

Final Words

Every cuddle, song, story, and silly dance matters.
You don't need baby TV shows, educational apps, or toddler tablets to give your child the best start — you already are enough.

You are your baby's **favourite toy, teacher, and safe place**.
And that's exactly what they need.

Pause to Ponder: Parents and Screens

As you embark on this parenting journey, consider your own use of screens during these early months. How often do you check your phone while feeding, cuddling, or bonding with your newborn? What messages might your little one receive about connection when you're distracted by devices during precious moments together?

By modelling balance, we can show our babies the importance of **real-life connection** over digital distractions. The habits we form now will shape their future relationships with technology.

Let's make sure that the first screens they see are **your loving eyes**, not a glowing device.

You Are Enough

You don't need fancy gadgets, expert apps, or educational videos to raise a brilliant child.
You just need **time**, **presence**, and **love**.

Waiting is worth it — delay screens.

Give your child the best start — for learning, language, and life

Thank you for being part of a growing movement of parents protecting the magic of early childhood.

Little minds. Big futures.

Find Out More

For more expert insights and resources on raising screen-free babies and toddlers, and to navigate the digital jungle with confidence, visit Sue Atkins websites and follow her on social media.

Stay connected with Sue:

- **Website**: https://navigatingthedigitaljungle.com/
- **Instagram**: https://www.instagram.com/sueatkinsparentingexpert/
- **TikTok:** https://www.tiktok.com/@sue.atkins
- **Facebook**: https://www.facebook.com/SueAtkinsTheParentingExpert/
- **Twitter**: https://x.com/SueAtkins
- **Bluesky:** https://bsky.app/profile/sueatkins.bsky.social
- **Threads:** https://www.threads.com/@sueatkinsparentingexpert
- **LinkedIn:** https://www.linkedin.com/in/sueatkins/
- **My Baby Gains:** https://mybabygains.org/

Join the Movement

Every small moment you choose connection over screens shapes a brighter, stronger future for your child.

You're not just delaying screens — you're unlocking potential, sparking imagination, and building foundations for lifelong learning, resilience, and joy.

Inspire others by sharing your journey!

Use the hashtag: #**ScreenFreeEarlyYears** **#NavigatingTheDigitalJungle** and be part of a global movement protecting childhood.

Sue Atkins is an internationally recognised Parenting Expert, Broadcaster, Speaker and Author of the Amazon best-selling books "Parenting Made Easy – How to Raise Happy Children' & 'Raising Happy Children for Dummies' one in the famous black and yellow series, as well as the 'Can Do Kid's Journal: Discover your Confidence Superpower' & 'The Divorce Journal for Kids'

Sue regularly works with Fortune 500 companies, brands, and celebrities.

Sue is the Parenting Expert for Disney Family and regularly appears on the award-winning flagship ITV show 'This Morning,' Good Morning Britain, 'Jeremy Vine on 5' and 'The Vanessa Feltz Show.' She is also the parenting expert for numerous BBC Radio Stations around the UK.

Sue Atkins is a proud winner of the prestigious #SBS (Small Business Sunday) Award, founded by entrepreneur and former Dragon's Den star Theo Paphitis. This recognition highlights Sue's dedication to empowering families to navigate the challenges of modern parenting, particularly in the digital age. Being part of the #SBS community not only celebrates her impactful work but also connects her with a vibrant network of innovative businesses across the UK.

Sue is also the global spokesperson for World Digital Detox Day and the Host of 'Navigating the Digital Jungle with Sue Atkins and Friends' Podcast, Patron for Mama Academy the UK's Safer Pregnancy Charity, and Trustee of the charity 'Technology Books for Children.



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