

Key Messages of the NAEYC/Fred Rogers Center Position Statement on Technology and Interactive Media in Early Childhood Programs

This summary highlights key messages of the January 2012 joint position statement, *Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*, issued by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media at Saint Vincent College.

Why this statement is important

Advances in technology and interactive media rapidly are transforming how we communicate and use information in our homes, offices, and early childhood settings. This position statement offers guidance—based on research-based knowledge of how young children grow and learn—on both the opportunities and the challenges of the use of technology and interactive media. The statement focuses on their use in early childhood programs—schools, centers, family child care—serving children from birth through age 8.

When used intentionally and appropriately, technology and interactive media are effective tools to support learning and development. The fundamental premise of the position statement is that technology and interactive media are tools for teachers and administrators to use in early childhood programs. The effectiveness of technology and interactive media, as with other tools, depends on their being used in the right ways, under the right circumstances, by those skilled in their use. Within the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, this means recognizing children as unique individuals, being attuned to their age and developmental level, and being responsive to the social and cultural contexts in which they live.

Effective uses of technology and media are active, hands-on, engaging, and empowering; give the child control; provide adaptive scaffolds to help children progress in skills development at their individual rates; and are used as one of many options to support children’s learning. Technology and interactive media should expand children’s access to new content and new skills. When truly integrated, uses of technology and media become routine and transparent—the child or the educator is focused on the activity or exploration itself and not on the technology.

Intentional use requires early childhood teachers and administrators to have information and resources regarding the nature of these tools and the implications of their use with children. Ultimately, the key decision regarding the use of technology and interactive media is whether specific goals—both for individual children and the program as a whole—can be more effectively achieved using traditional classroom materials, or whether the use of particular technology and interactive media tools actually extends the opportunities for learning and development. There are many ways that technology can extend opportunities for learning and



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development—helping to better meet the needs of individual children (e.g., assistive technologies that improve children’s ability to learn, move, communicate, and create); supporting enhanced communication with families (e.g., digital portfolios

documenting children's progress); and providing children new opportunities for exploration and mastery (e.g., making a book of scanned images of children's artwork and dictations).

When making decisions about technology, program administrators must consider the allocation of limited resources and cost effectiveness, including initial cost, the ongoing costs of updating and upgrading hardware and software, and unspecified costs, such as additional items needed to use the product. Decisions about resource allocations also should consider the range of available and increasingly affordable technology along with the associated learning value and cost effectiveness relative to other materials.

Limitations on the use of technology and media are important. The statement recommends carefully considering the screen time recommendations from public health organizations for children from birth through age 5 when determining appropriate limits on technology and media use in early childhood settings. Screen time estimates should include time spent in front of a screen at the early childhood program and, with input from parents and families, at home and elsewhere.

When used appropriately, and keeping screen time recommendations in mind, technology and interactive media have the potential to enhance, without replacing, creative play, exploration, physical activity, outdoor experiences, conversation, and social interactions. Technology should never be used in ways that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. This includes undue exposure to violence or highly sexualized images.

Special considerations must be given to the use of technology with infants and toddlers. The statement recommends prohibiting the passive use of television, videos, DVDs, and other non-interactive technologies and media in early childhood programs for children younger than 2 years of age, and it discourages passive and non-interactive uses with children ages 2 through 5. Any uses of technology and interactive media in programs for children younger than 2 years of age should be limited to those that appropriately support responsive interactions between caregivers and children and strengthen adult-child relationships.

Attention to digital citizenship and equitable access is essential. When using technology and interactive media, teachers and administrators in early childhood programs have a responsibility to protect and empower children by helping them learn to ask questions and think critically about the technologies and media they use. Adults have a responsibility to model good digital citizenship, defined as developmentally appropriate and active uses of digital tools, media, and methods of communication and learning in safe, healthy, acceptable, responsible, and socially positive ways. Digital citizenship also means working to assure equitable access to technology and interactive media experiences.

Ongoing research and professional development are needed. It is difficult to imagine the technological options that will be available in a few short years, yet alone what today's young children will use as adults. We can anticipate, however, the need for professional development and research.

Teachers and administrators need information and resources to effectively select, use, integrate, and evaluate technology and interactive media tools in intentional and developmentally appropriate ways. They need to stay current regarding the rapid changes in technology and the implications for their use in programs.

Preservice and professional development should include in-depth, hands-on technology experiences, ongoing support, and access to the latest technology and interactive media. Educators need opportunities to play and create using these tools. And, examples of successful integrations of technology and interactive media in early childhood programs should be compiled to provide support and inspiration.

Ongoing research is needed to better understand how young children use and learn with technology and interactive media and to better understand any short- and long-term effects. Research should help guide policy and evidence-based practice, ensuring that, now and in the future, the use of technology and interactive media is intentional and developmentally appropriate for all children, extending and supporting active, hands-on, creative, and authentic engagement with those around them and with their world.