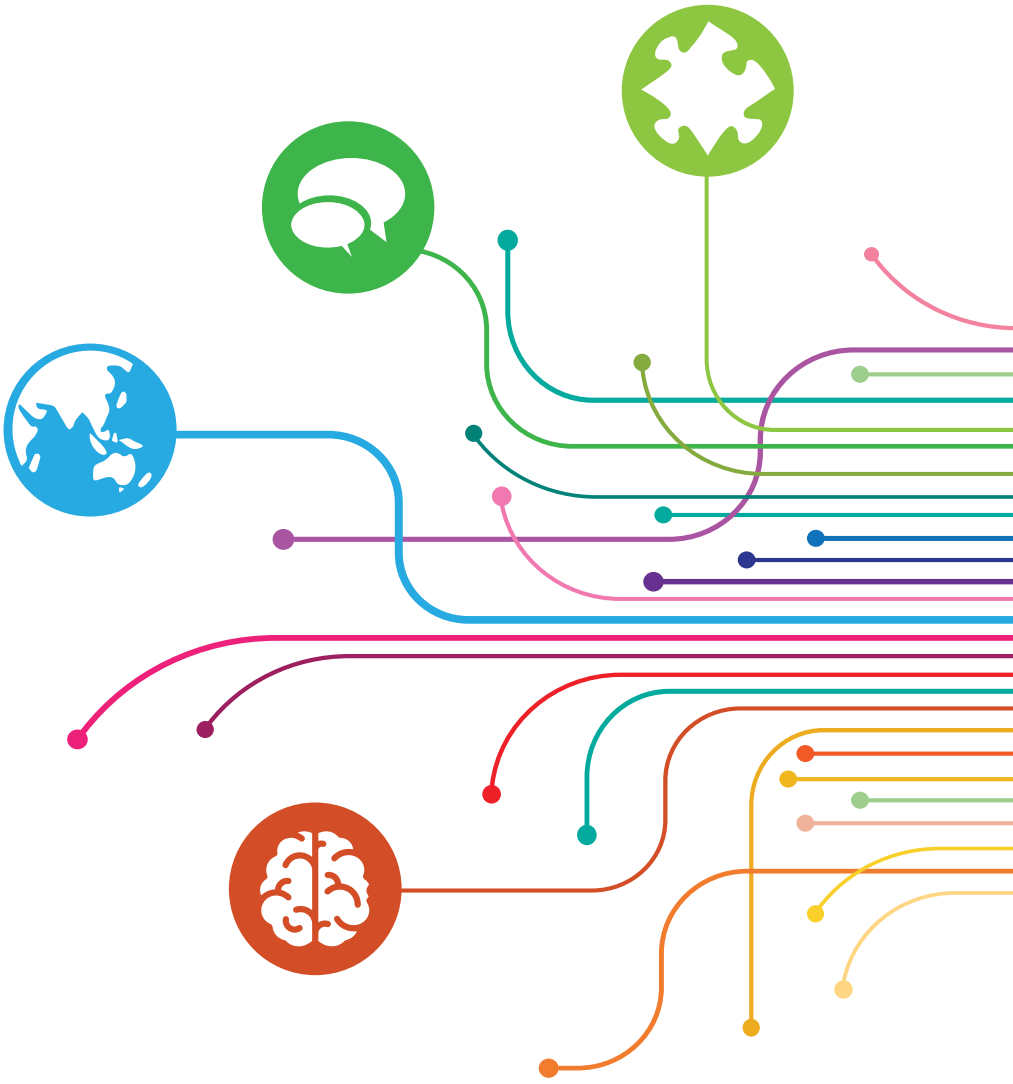
Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children



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Statement on young children and digital technologies—A summary

Practice advice for early childhood educators

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About the summary

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) developed the *Statement on young children and digital technologies* in response to an identified need for guidance for early childhood professionals. Drawn directly from the Statement, the principles and practice advice in this summary are intended to facilitate professional reflection on the role and optimal use of digital technologies with, by and for young children, according to the digital contexts in which young children, their families and educators play, live and work.

The principles and practice advice are provided across four known areas of importance in early childhood education:

Relationships

Citizenship

Health and wellbeing

Play and pedagogy

About us

ECA's vision is that every young child is thriving and learning. To achieve this, we champion the rights of young children to thrive and learn at home, in the community, within early learning settings and through the early years of school. Our work builds the capacity of our society and the early childhood sector to realise the potential of every child during the critical early years from birth to the age of eight. ECA specifically acknowledges the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and the past and current injustices and realities for them around Australia.

ECA would like to thank the Digital Policy Group for their support in the development of the *Statement on young children and digital technologies*.

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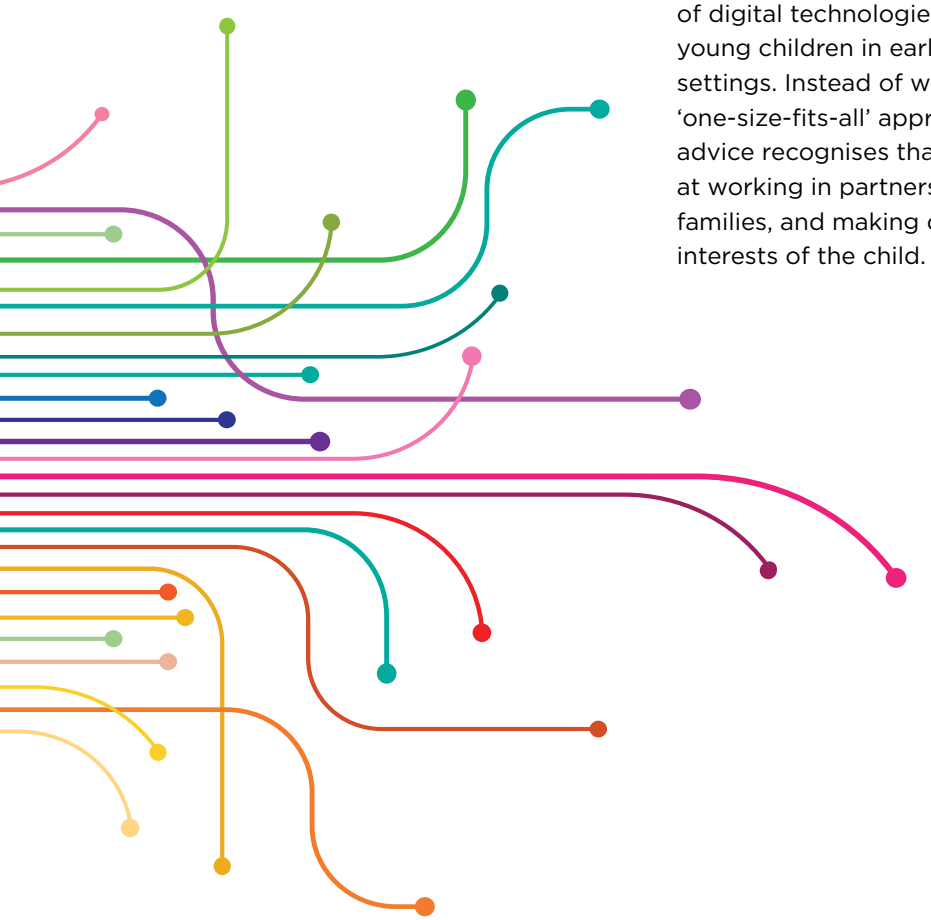
Further information about the *Statement on young children and digital technologies* can be found at: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/digital-tech-statement.

Young children and digital technologies

Young children today are growing up in digital contexts. Digital contexts involve people in the use of digital technologies for a range of purposes. Today, the many types of digital technologies used by people in daily life include computers, tablets, smart televisions, smartphones and smart watches. Digital technologies are frequently networked or connected, enabling people to share, communicate, store, retrieve and manipulate digital data for education, entertainment, recreational, organisational and work purposes.



Many young children now regularly access the internet via touchscreen technologies and the Internet of Toys. Young children and their families participate in digital contexts according to the access they have to digital technologies and the internet, and the views they hold about the relevance and role of digital technology in their lives. The experience of growing up in digital contexts is not universally the same—not every child and family will use, value or understand digital technologies in the same way.

As such, there is no simple answer to understanding the role and optimal use of digital technologies with, by and for young children in early childhood education settings. Instead of working towards a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, this practice advice recognises that educators are skilled at working in partnership with children and families, and making decisions in the best interests of the child.

RELATIONSHIPS

Young children in digital contexts interact, engage, access and learn how to use digital technologies in relationships with other people, including the adults (e.g. family members, parents, kinship members, educators) and peers (e.g. friends, siblings, extended family members) in their lives. These relationships facilitate and influence children's engagement with digital technologies.

Principle: Young children's relationships with adults and peers matter in digital contexts

Practice advice:

1. Use digital technologies in early childhood education and care settings to promote social interactions between children, peers and adults.
2. Support children in turn-taking and learning to share when using digital technologies in collaboration with others.
3. Foster children's peer-to-peer interactions as opportunities for co-learning about and with digital technologies.
4. Model self-regulated digital technology use with children and families that recognises the importance of sustained social interactions between children and adults.
5. Create shared understandings between families, educators and services about digital technology use, by adults, in front of children.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The way that young children interact, engage with and experience digital technologies can have implications for health and wellbeing. This includes their physical activity, posture, vision, sleep and emotions.

Principle: Young children's health and wellbeing is actively supported in digital contexts

Practice advice:

1. Provide digital technology experiences for young children that promote movement opportunities.
2. Ensure children participate in both digital and non-digital activities to build strength and skills in their hands and fingers.
3. Ensure that screen-based digital technology use while sitting is only for short periods and does not replace periods of active physical movement.
4. Promote postural awareness and change by providing a variety of spaces and heights for children to use digital technologies.
5. Minimise screen glare and reflection and promote regular breaks with a variety of visual distances when using screen-based technologies.
6. Support families to understand that exposure to disturbing or arousing content and screens in the hour before sleep time decreases the length and quality of children's sleep.
7. Promote screen-free sleeping areas and the use of non-screen-based calming activities with children before nap times and evening bedtimes.
8. Help children develop self-regulation for using digital technologies and support them to transition from digital to non-digital activities.
9. Establish routines and structures that promote access to a variety of digital and non-digital activities in the early childhood education and care setting.

CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship in digital contexts recognises that young children are active participants in their communities now and into the future. As citizens, young children respect their own rights and those of other people, and develop an appreciation for cultural, racial, gender and religious diversity. Digital rights, digital privacy, online safety and cyber-safety education provide a foundation for early citizenship in digital contexts.

Principle: Young children's citizenship is upheld and fostered in digital contexts

Practice advice:

1. Participate in professional learning opportunities to build educator understanding about young children's digital rights and how these relate to young children's socioeconomic, geographic, gender and culturally based experiences in digital contexts.
2. Seek permission from children and families to use digital documentation, including photographs of children via social media and/or other digital documentation platforms.
3. Develop policies and guidelines about the collection, use, retention and deletion of digital data held about young children and families.
4. Ensure proactive adult supervision of young children's online activities, including the use of filters and restrictions on devices and networks in the early childhood education and care setting.
5. Maintain conversations with young children about their online experiences, both positive and negative, to ensure they are supported by adults in their online engagements.
6. Help children develop an understanding of the internet as a network that people use to generate, store, retrieve and share information.
7. Model internet use with children for learning purposes and provide opportunities for assessing the quality and relevance of information.
8. Direct families towards government and/or not-for-profit organisations for advice on the selection of digital media, content, apps and games that are appropriate for use by young children.

PLAY AND PEDAGOGY

Young children have opportunities for play and pedagogy in digital contexts. Play and pedagogy involve children using a range of digital devices for exploration, meaning-making, collaboration and problem-solving. Educators engage in active decision making about the use and non-use of digital technologies for learning.

Principle: Play and pedagogy promotes young children's exploration, social interaction, collaboration and learning in digital contexts

Practice advice:

1. Provide opportunities for children to explore and experiment with the functions of a diverse range of digital technologies alongside adult modelling and instruction in digital technology use.
2. Promote play involving children in digital technology use with digital and non-digital tools and materials to build knowledge about the use of technologies for communication, collaboration and information sharing.
3. Seek young children's perspectives regarding the role and use of digital technologies in their own lives, play and learning.
4. Model active decision making regarding digital technology use with, by and for young children that provides a balance of digital and non-digital experiences and activities in early childhood education and care settings.

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