



EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA'S

# Statement on young children and digital technologies—A summary

ADVICE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS



**Early Childhood  
Australia**  
A voice for young children

# Young children and digital technologies

Young children today are growing up in digital contexts, with computers, tablets, smart televisions, smartphones, robots, biometrics, automated systems, voice assistants, extended reality and Artificial Intelligence (AI) all now part of our daily lives.

However, children's access to digital technologies and the internet are influenced by many factors, including their families' cultural backgrounds and beliefs about technologies, socioeconomic resources, as well as geographic location, gender and age. This means that not every child, family and service will use, value or understand digital technologies in the same way.

There are many different theoretical viewpoints about the relationship between digital technologies and society. Some of these include:

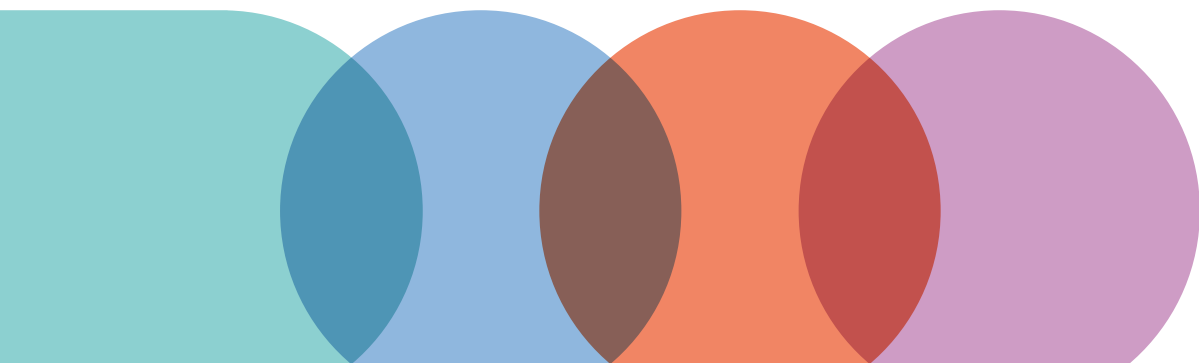
- 'technological determinism', which holds that technology will 'determine' what happens to people, e.g. an educator might think that digital media negatively influences children's play.
- 'substantive'—digital technologies become part of how society operates; people do not notice the actual technology as much as the social aspects of its use. For example, focusing on how a smartphone enables communication.

- 'critical perspective' considers the impact of the values that people bring to technologies. For example, the value informing the design and use of screen-readers is inclusion. The value informing the design and use of profit-generating computer games is commercialisation.

These ways of thinking about digital technologies highlight that 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 applying 'one-size-fits-all' advice, ECA's Statement on young children and digital technologies aims to deliver an evidence base on which educators can make decisions regarding young children and digital technologies that are relevant to the various digital contexts experienced by children and their families.

This Statement provides an overview of existing research about young children and digital technologies in four key areas: relationships, health and wellbeing, citizenship, and play and pedagogy. Each of the four areas addressed is accompanied by a guiding principle and practice advice 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.



## About the summary

The revised ECA Statement on young children and digital technologies has been updated in consultation with a Digital Policy Advisory Group, with representation from leading Australian organisations and contributions from experts in early learning and digital technologies.

Like the first version of the ECA Statement on young children and digital technologies, this revision was informed by sector consultation, published research and expert advice from within Australia and internationally. Extensive sector engagement included a national online survey and a participant-based workshop at the 2024 ECA National Conference.

Expert advice was sought regarding young children and digital technologies in the areas of:



**Relationships**



**Health and wellbeing**



**Citizenship**



**Play and pedagogy**

This Statement is intended to support the professional practice, learning and reflection of early childhood educators working with young children aged birth to eight years in Australian early childhood education and care settings, including long day care, kindergarten/preschool, pre-prep, occasional care, family day care, the first years of school and/or outside school hours care. The term 'educator' is used throughout to include early childhood teachers, educators and support staff who work directly with children to promote learning, development and wellbeing in early childhood settings. The Statement may also be of interest to allied professionals, such as those in health, community or social services working with young children and their families.

## About Early Childhood Australia

Early Childhood Australia's (ECA) 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 capability 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.

Early Childhood Australia would like to thank the Digital Policy Advisory Group for their valuable expertise and enthusiasm over the past two years in supporting the preparation of this Statement.

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Further information about the *Statement on young children and digital technologies* and associated resources can be found at:





# Relationships

Young children in digital contexts interact, engage, access and learn how to use digital technologies in relationship 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:

01

Use digital technologies in early childhood education and care settings with children, peers and adults to promote and sustain social interactions.

02

Support children in turn-taking and learning to share when using digital technologies in collaboration with others.

03

Foster children's peer-to-peer interactions as opportunities for co-learning about and with digital technologies.

04

Model self-regulated digital technology use with children and families that recognises the importance of sustained social interactions between children and adults without technologies.

05

Help children to understand that digital assistants and popular culture characters are different from their trusted adults.

06

Invite children's active contribution to digital documentation and model consent for the use of digital images and videos online.

07

Create shared understandings between families, educators and services about how adults use digital technology in front of children.



# Health and wellbeing

The way that young children interact, engage with and experience digital technologies can have positive or detrimental 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:

01

Provide a range of digital and non-digital experiences for young children that help them move their bodies, including being outside in natural light using sun-safe practices.

02

Ensure children participate in non-digital activities to build strength and skills in their hands and fingers.

03

Ensure that screen-based digital technology use while sitting is only for short periods and does not replace periods of active physical movement.

04

Promote postural change by providing a variety of digital technologies that invite children to use their bodies in different spaces and at a range of heights.

05

Minimise screen glare and reflection and promote regular visual breaks with a variety of visual distances when using screen-based technologies.

06

Support families to promote screen-free sleeping areas and understand that exposure to disturbing or stimulating content, especially before sleep, may decrease the length and quality of children's sleep.

07

Help children develop self-regulation for using digital technologies and support them to transition between digital and non-digital activities.



# Citizenship

Young children are active citizens in the digital contexts in which they play, learn, live and grow. Citizenship invites children to respect their own rights and those of others, relate to their communities and to appreciate the diverse backgrounds and experiences of people. Children's digital rights, privacy and online-safety education provide a foundation for safe, fair and equitable participation in digital contexts.

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

### Practice advice:

01

Participate in professional learning opportunities to build 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.

02

Commit to working ethically with children and families when using digital documentation and AI, including obtaining consent to use images and video of children via digital documentation platforms and educational AI applications.

03

Develop policies and guidelines about the collection, use, retention and deletion of digital data held about young children and communicate these to families.

04

Ensure active adult supervision of young children's online activities, including the use of filters and restrictions on devices and networks, checking privacy and location settings, and always co-use devices with children in the education setting.

05

Facilitate and maintain conversations with young children about their online experiences, both positive and negative, to ensure they are supported by trusted adults in their online engagements.

06

Help children develop an understanding of the internet as a network that people and AI use to generate, store, retrieve and share information.

07

Model internet use with children for learning purposes and provide opportunities for assessing the quality and relevance of information generated by people and AI.

08

Direct families towards government and trusted not-for-profit organisations for advice on selecting digital media, content, apps, games and AI 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 involves children and educators 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:**

01

Provide opportunities for children to explore and experiment with a diverse range of digital technologies alongside adult modelling, questioning, demonstrating and discussion of digital technology use.

02

Promote play involving children in digital technology use with combinations of non-digital and digital materials to build knowledge about the safe use of technologies for communicating and collaborating with other people, and generating, seeking, evaluating and sharing information.

03

Invite and listen to young children's perspectives about the role and use of digital technologies and media in their own lives, play and learning.

04

Recognise children's digital and media interests as a provocation for intentional learning experiences and an opportunity for connection between peers.

05

Engage in deliberate decision-making regarding digital technology use with, by and for young children that recognises opportunities for inclusion and promotes equity and access to digital learning.

