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Department  
for Education

Guidance

# Home learning environment early years apps: parent guidance

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## Choosing apps

There are many apps that are labelled as 'educational', but parents do need to check that this is the case, as there is variation in quality and content.

The following questions can help you choose apps for your child. They are based on the criteria used by the Department for Education to identify high-quality apps for young children, and reflect the findings from many research studies of what works best for early learning apps for children.

The apps recommended on the [Hungry Little Minds campaign site](#) have met all of these criteria.

## How educational is the app?

- Are the educational aims of the app clear? What sort of early learning goals do you think are being addressed when your child is playing with the app. [Read the early years foundation stage statutory framework](#).

- Is your child having fun but still learning something new?
- Does the app encourage both play and creativity for your child?
- Are the activities structured so that you can see how your child is building on things they already know? For example, the activities in the app might get harder the more they play on it.
- If you can find out, see if the app has been tested in academic research, or had input from an educational expert. It's worth looking up who has made it or who has been consulted.

## Support in the app for learning and development

- Does the app provide support for children when they get stuck? For example, prompts on screen or through voice over and audio.
- Does the app provide helpful feedback to the child? For example, letting them know when they are doing well, or if they need to have another go.
- Is the app easy for the child to navigate on their own, to aid learning?

## Interaction with other people and the outside world

Not all apps are designed to support interaction with others, as they may focus instead on independent use.

- Does the app encourage your child to interact with other people or virtual characters while playing the activities, where this is appropriate?
- Does the app provide feedback to an adult or older helper, so they can support your child's learning?
- Does the app make it clear how yours/your child's data is being collected and used? Please see the government's [guidance about keeping children safe online](#).

## Engagement

- Is the app fun and exciting to use, engaging your child over a length of time or a variety of plays?
- Does the app offer a variety of features and activity types, where appropriate?
- Does the app enable personalisation, for example, the child can insert their

name, photographs etc?

## Design and functionality

- Is there a clear menu or home button?
- Is the app well designed and attractive to children?
- Is the app free from stereotypes, for example around gender, race and disability but also other stereotypes?
- Does the app enable parents to adjust the settings?
- Are any in-app adverts or links to the internet behind a parental gate, for example with a hard maths sum?

## Using apps

The first question that most parents have is, 'How long should I let my child use an app?'

There's no simple answer to this question, as each child is an individual, and each context is different. If your child is engaged with an app and it appears to be offering valuable learning opportunities, then you should not be too concerned about time, within reason – young children should have a varied diet of activities every day, including physical activity.

If your child is spending long periods of time using apps which are of limited quality, or repetitive in nature, then you should limit the time spent on them.

When you download an app for your child, spend time using it yourself first, so that you can become familiar with it, and help them if they struggle using it. As they use it, if you are not able to use it with them, try to keep an eye on what they are doing to ensure that they are not getting frustrated or lost within the app.

For young children, learning is best supported through external interactions with adults and so it would be good if you can find some time to use apps with them. Even just 10 minutes of doing an activity together is beneficial, and talking about what they are playing or learning. If this is not possible because of your everyday demands, then talking to your child at a different time about the apps they are using will be helpful, and show that you have an interest in their learning.

There is other helpful guidance for parents of young children on using apps:

- [Toddlers and Tablets: Ten First Steps](#)
- [Smart Parenting in the Digital Age](#)
- [Exploring Play and Creativity in Young Children's Use of Apps: A Guide for](#)

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