

# Too much screen time for the kids? Grandparents may also be complicit

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Grandparents have long been associated with letting their grandchildren do things their parents would never permit. Candy. Extended bedtime. Too much television. Carefree fun. They like to spoil their grandchildren.

A new study by Rutgers and other researchers finds that today's grandparents are still true to their traditional fun-loving image—allowing their [grandchildren](#), while under their supervision, to spend about half of their time on a [mobile phone](#), tablet, computer or TV.

The study, published in the *Journal of Children and Media*, suggests that grandparents should restrict [media](#) use by setting simple rules for screen time when babysitting. This is particularly needed when children bring a device from home and expect to watch even more.

"Grandparents play a very significant role in raising their grandchildren. We need to educate them about the impact of media on children's lives and on proper use that will benefit the wellbeing of their grandchildren," said study co-author Dafna

Lemish, a distinguished professor of journalism and media studies and associate dean for programs at Rutgers University-New Brunswick's School of Communication and Information.

The study reviewed the experiences of grandparents of children ages 2-7 who take care of their grandchildren at least once per week and found that during an average four-hour visit, the children spent two hours either watching videos or playing games on electronic devices.

Among the findings:

- Many grandparents feel less confident in managing children's use of interactive media, such as games, than in managing their use of non-interactive videos. This may be due to lack of experience with games or apps.
- Some children's parents give the grandparents instructions about how to handle media use. This, ironically, leads to more screen time viewing.
- Grandfathers in the study allowed more interactive screen time than did grandmothers, perhaps because they are more comfortable with the technology.
- On average, grandparents had more difficulty in managing the media use of boys and older children than of girls and younger children. Boys on average spent 17 minutes more than girls with media related activities.
- Grandparents allow more screen time when they care for children in their own homes versus the children's homes. They also allow more screen time when the child brings a tablet or other device from home, as 22 percent of grandchildren do.
- The lowest amount of time dedicated to media use per visit with grandparents was found among children aged 2 to 3, at an average of 98 minutes per visit. Children aged 4 to 5 spent an average of 106

minutes with [electronic devices](#), and children aged 6 to 7 had 143 minutes of screen [time](#), on average per visit.

The study offers the following recommendations:

- Grandparents who set strict rules (such as not more than an hour; not before bedtime; not during meals) succeed in reducing their grandchildren's [screen time](#).
- Parents should supply toys, games and books to help [grandparents](#) keep [children](#) busy.

**More information:** Nelly Elias et al, The ultimate treat? Young Israeli children's media use under their grandparents' care, *Journal of Children and Media* (2019). DOI: [10.1080/17482798.2019.1627228](https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2019.1627228)

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