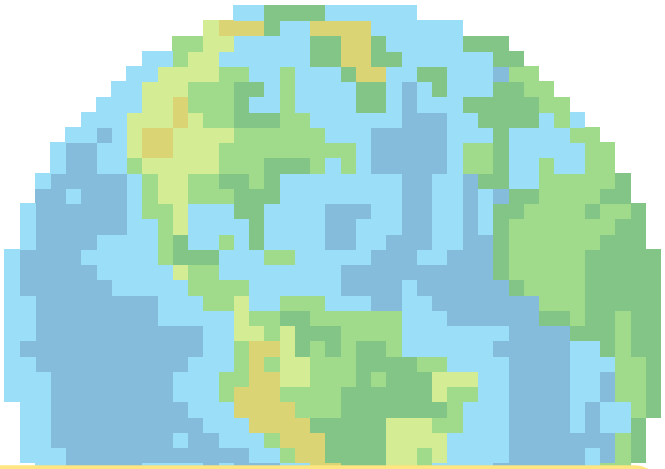
Ages: 0 – 5 years

The Pie Chart of Play and the 5 Cs

Creating Daily Balance in a Digital World

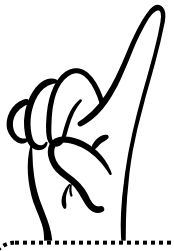
Digital media is a big part of family life. Screens can offer opportunities for learning, connection, and play. They can also take time away from other experiences that are important for young children's development.



To help families navigate this, the **American Academy of Pediatrics** released updated guidance on children and digital media in early 2026.

Digital media, or "screens" for short, includes television, smartphones, computers, video games, apps, and social media.

Inspired by this guidance, the Pie Chart of Play helps families find balance in their children's daily activities. It encourages families to see screens as one part of their child's day, alongside the many other experiences they need to learn, grow, connect, and thrive.

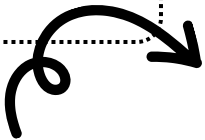


Plan: The Slices

First, you'll create a **Pie Chart of Play** to plan and visualize a balanced daily routine for your child—one that makes plenty of room for sleep, physical activity, imaginative play, learning, and time connecting with others.

Reflect on your child's average day and the kinds of activities they do.

Use the **chart on the next page** to note how many hours—on average—you'd like them to spend on each activity.



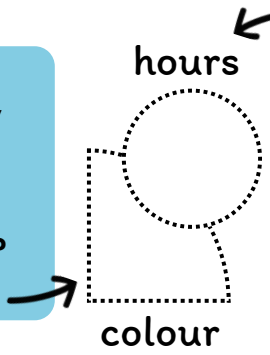
Your Child's Pie

Every day will be different. Focus on the **overall balance**, rather than any single day.

Sleep & Rest

This slice is for sleeping! When we sleep, our brains and bodies rest, grow, and get ready for a new day.

What colour should your sleep slice be?

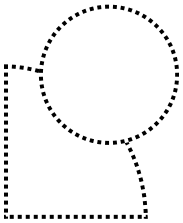


Use these recommendations to plan your slices:

- *0-3 months: 14-17 hours*
- *4-12 months: 12-16 hours*
- *1-2 years: 11-14 hours*
- *3-5 years: 10-13 hours*

Movement

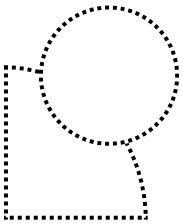
This slice is for running, jumping, and playing! Moving our bodies helps us grow strong, learn new skills, and feel good.



- *Under 1: Daily floor play, including 30 minutes of tummy time for infants*
- *Ages 1-5: At least 3 hours of movement throughout the day*

Hands-on Play

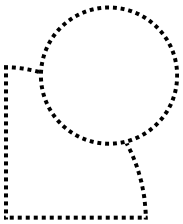
This slice is for building and creating! When we play with blocks, make puzzles, or do art, we use our hands and imagination to explore and learn.



- *Make plenty of room for child-led, unstructured play that encourages creativity, exploration, social skills, and problem-solving.*

Connection

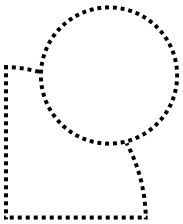
This slice is for special time together —talking, playing, and reading stories. Connection builds emotional resilience and brain development.



- *Make time throughout the day for back-and-forth interaction, shared reading, family routines, and dedicated "special time" together.*

Digital Media

Screens can be fun and sometimes help kids learn, but we want to make sure they don't take away from all the other important slices. It's all about balance.



- *Under 2: Prioritize screen-free play and interaction. Video chatting is ok.*
- *Age 2-5: Aim for 1 hour or less per day of high-quality, educational content, ideally watched together.*

Make: The Pie

Young children learn best through responsive interactions—talking, playing, and responding back and forth with others. They learn through hands-on play that lets them explore, create, and discover. Grab your art supplies and visualize your plan. Slice up the day into a nourishing pie made up of the activities that help them grow, learn, connect, and thrive.

Materials Needed:

- A printout of the template on page 6, or plain paper
- Crayons, markers, or paint
- A pencil
- Tape, a pin, or a magnet (to display the pie)

Steps:

1) Slice up your pie:
Using the template (page 6) and your chart (page 2), divide up your 24-hour day into slices:

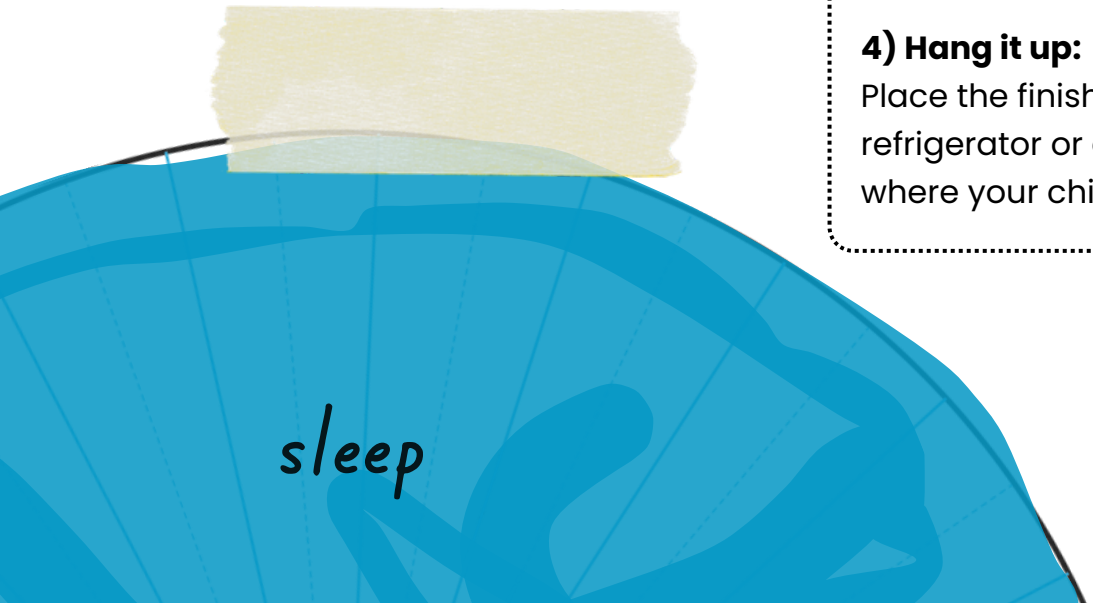
- Sleep & Rest
- Connection
- Movement
- Hands-on Play
- Digital Media

Some activities fit into more than one slice! Play outside together includes movement, play, and connection. Choose the slice that fits best—the goal is balance, not tracking every minute.

2) Colour the slices:
Invite your child fill in the slices based on their chosen colours.

3) Label the slices:
Label each section, noting the number of hours for each activity (optional).

4) Hang it up:
Place the finished pie on your refrigerator or a low bulletin board where your child can see it.



Practice: The 5 Cs

Ask yourself these five questions to help decide which digital experiences earn a spot in your child's "digital media slice."

Child

Does this digital experience fit my child's developmental stage and needs?

Content

Is it high-quality, engaging, and age-appropriate, without harmful content or excessive advertising?

Calm

Does my child stay emotionally regulated during and after using this media?

Communication

Am I making time to watch, play, or talk with my child about what they're seeing and doing on screens?

Crowding Out

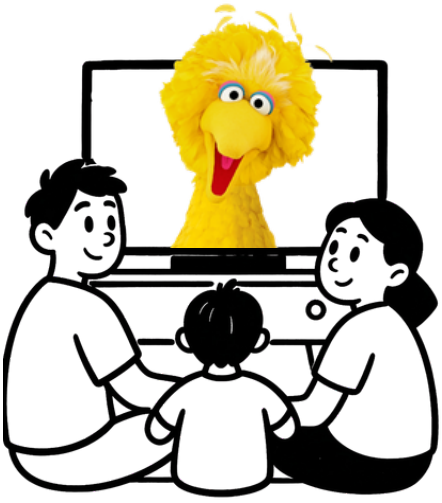
Is there still room for sleep, movement, hands-on play, and connection?

LOOK FOR:

- Age-appropriate, engaging content
- Stories and activities children can follow, understand, and learn through creativity, movement, or interaction
- Opportunities to co-view: watching, playing, and talking together

WATCH FOR:

- Fast-paced or highly stimulating content.
- Autoplay, endless feeds, and algorithm-driven recommendations
- Frequent advertising or highly commercialized content
- Frightening or violent content
- Design features that make it difficult for children to stop



Co-viewing screens can make digital media a shared learning experience that supports healthy development by:

- Helping children understand content by connecting it to the real world.
- Strengthening relationships by deepening the caregiver-child bond.
- Promoting learning through language development.

Balanced Days Tracker

Each day, colour a star when you've taken a moment to notice how your family's day felt.

Was there room for sleep, movement, play, and connection?

No day needs to be perfect.

At the end of the week, talk about what worked and what you'd like to do differently next week.

Week of:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
.....	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆
.....	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆	☆

Tips for Success

Model the balance you want to see
When you can, put your own device away during play, meals, and conversations.

Build a toolkit for big feelings
Avoid making screens the primary way your child learns to calm down. Use comfort, connection, movement, and play to help your child learn to manage big feelings.

Make smooth transitions
Use a visual countdown timer or a 5-minute warning before turning screens off. Pivot into a fun activity on your pie, like picking out a book for connection time.

Keep screens out of the bedroom
Create a consistent place for devices to 'sleep' outside of your child's bedroom, especially overnight.

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _’s Pie Chart of Play

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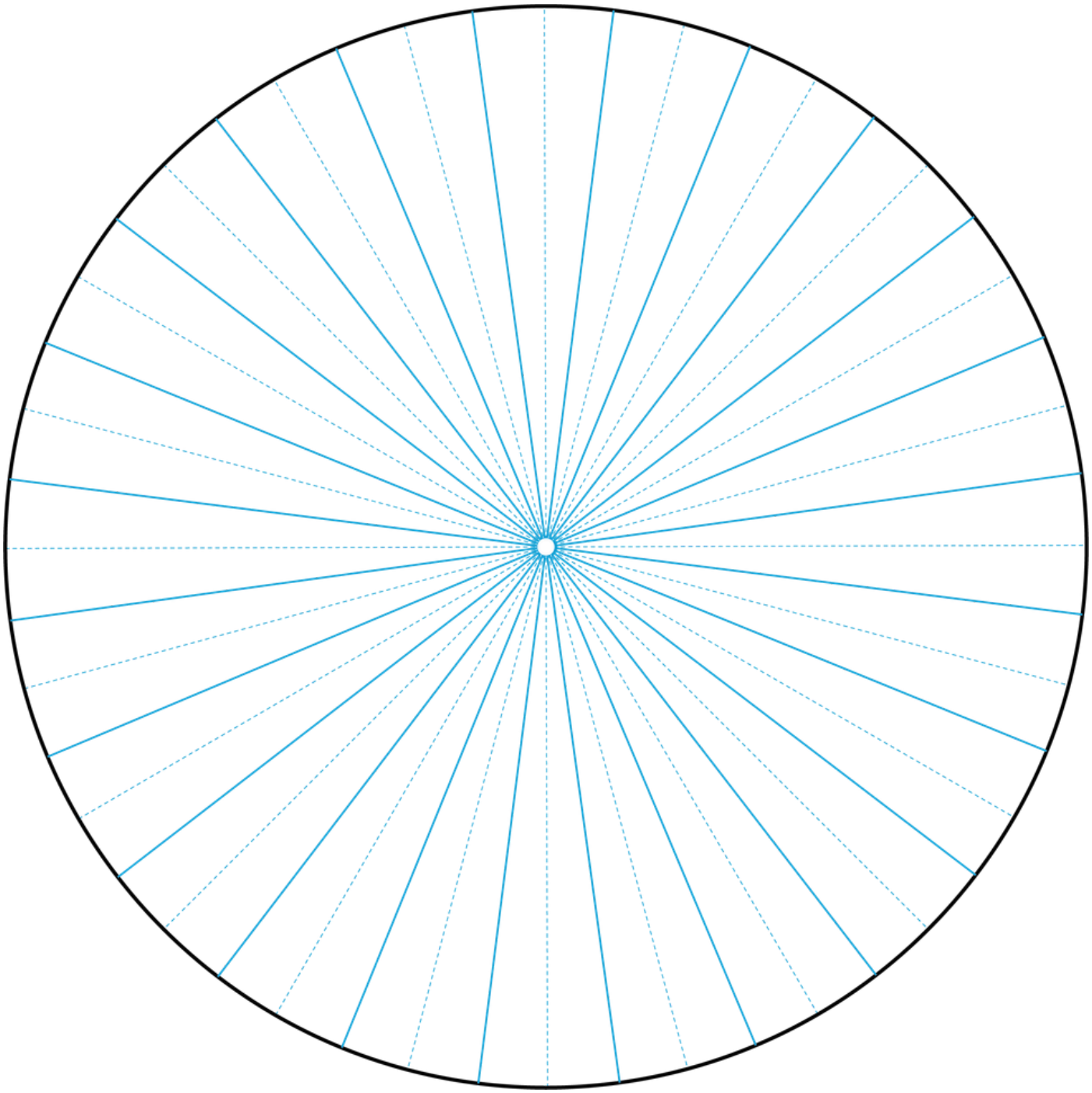

This guide was informed by evidence from the American Academy of Pediatrics’ Digital Ecosystem, Children, and Adolescents: Policy Statement (2026)

More digital media guidance

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Determinants of Child Development Lab

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY