

Children's Media Insider Sounds the Alarm: "No Screens Under 2" Policies Are Fueling the Crisis They Were Meant to Prevent

In a landmark TEDx talk, former industry executive Will Maurer reveals the "Regulatory Void" enabling a multi-billion-dollar exploitation of early childhood.

LOS ANGELES, May 5, 2026 — Will Maurer, a veteran media executive and the Executive Director of the **Children's Media Research and Reform Lab (CMRRL)**, has released a provocative TEDx talk that challenges the very foundation of modern parenting advice. Maurer opens his talk, "**Screen Time for Children Under 2: Fixing a Broken System**," with a question that is as uncomfortable as it is necessary: Are "NO screen time" guidelines helping, or are they exacerbating the very crisis they claim to address?

The data tells the story policymakers ignore:

- Screen exposure typically begins by [four months of age](#)
- Daily viewing approaches one hour by [six months](#)
- More than 75% of infants are watching screens before their [first birthday](#)
- That number rises to over 90% by [age two](#)

Maurer argues that these rigid, unrealistic guidelines have created a "Regulatory Void" that a multi-billion-dollar industry is actively exploiting.

An Insider's Epiphany: "Complicit but Not Complacent"

"As a new father, I assumed two decades inside the very industry shaping children's media experiences would help me cut through all the noise on screen time," said Maurer. "Instead, I

found a systemic failure — one that prioritizes profit, engagement metrics, and deceptive marketing over the health and wellbeing of young children."

That realization was the catalyst for Maurer to undertake years of research on early childhood development and the effects of screen time. What he found surprised him: the industry's standard production techniques, seemingly innocuous to the untrained eye, were being engineered to capture and hold the attention of young children. By overloading their cognitive and sensory pathways, these designs create a cycle of dependency that is increasingly difficult to break. Parents, educators and practitioners rarely have the digital literacy training to recognize these overstimulating elements, much less the tools to support a child who has become dysregulated by them.

"As a producer, I knew the ingredients. But I never understood the impact on a child's developing brain," he said. "I felt complicit. I refused to be complacent."

After twenty years in the media industry, Maurer launched CMRRL, a nonprofit translating developmental science into evidence-based tools, resources, and solutions. His goal: to build an ecosystem that supports digital wellbeing in the earliest years, much the same as we do for children's physical and nutritional safety.

A Regulatory Void by Design

Maurer's central argument is that well-intentioned "No Screens Under 2" policies have inadvertently stifled the funding and support needed for safer evidence-informed alternatives. This policy vacuum has allowed commercial platforms to thrive, targeting anxious parents with labels like "educational," "slow," "baby-safe," and "developed by experts," with little research, evidence, or accountability behind the claims.

Maurer identifies a broken ecosystem defined by three distinct points of failure

- **Unchecked Industry Tactics:** An emboldened, unregulated industry targets families with unverified claims, facing zero accountability for the harmful design practices used to capture a child's attention
- **The Insight Gap:** Well-meaning expert advice, written without “insider” production insight or a clinical understanding of its impact, leaves parents trapped in a cycle of confusion and children dangerously vulnerable
- **A Failure of Protection:** Guidelines intended to protect families are doing more harm than good by refusing to provide a realistic "middle ground" — effectively abandoning parents without safer, research-backed options

"Parents bear the brunt of the blame, the shame, and the burden," said Maurer. **“This is not a parenting failure; it’s a systemic failure. But there is a way forward.”**

A Blueprint for Change, Built on a Classic Model

Maurer closes his talk with a call to action drawn from a children’s media pioneer: Fred Rogers, who designed the original framework for children's media reform more than half a century ago. Maurer argues that today’s crisis, compounded by the rise of AI-generated content, demands a Rogers-scale overhaul:

- New standards and regulations for early childhood media
- Public investment in developmentally aligned screen content for children under 2
- Digital literacy tools and training for the parents, educators, and practitioners on the front lines

The full TEDx talk, transcript, and fact sheet are available at cmrrl.org.

About Will Maurer: Will Maurer is the Executive Director of the Children's Media Research and Reform Lab (CMRRL) and a leading voice in children's media reform. A 20-year veteran of the media industry, he specializes in bridging developmental science, industry expertise, and digital literacy, providing an insider's perspective on the children's screen time crisis.

About CMRRL: The Children's Media Research and Reform Lab is a nonprofit that advances digital literacy through rigorous research, evidence-based tools, and public education and advocacy for parents, educators, and practitioners navigating screen time in the earliest years. Our mission is to ensure that the digital environment surrounding our youngest children reflects the same care, intention, and safety that guides every other facet of early childhood practice.

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