

Screen time linked with developmental delays in toddlerhood

A study published in the journal JAMA Pediatrics found that a child handling a smartphone or tablet from one to four hours of screen time is linked to developmental delays starting from age 1. Delays include communication, fine motor, problem-solving and personal and social skills by age 2.



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Four or more hours with screens significantly increased delays: 4.78 times more likely to have underdeveloped communication skills, 1.74 times more likely to have impaired fine motor skills and 2 times more likely to have underdeveloped personal and social skills.

“It’s a really important study because it has a very large sample size of children who’ve been followed for several years,” said Dr. Jason Nagata, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco, who wasn’t involved in the study. “The study fills an important gap because it identifies specific developmental delays (in skills) such as communication and problem-solving associated with screen time,” said Nagata, noting there haven’t been many prior studies that studied this issue with several years of follow-up data.

HOW SCREEN TIME CAN AFFECT DEVELOPMENT

The potential harms of screen time on communication skills may have to do with children being robbed of drivers for language development, Dr. John Hutton, associate professor of general and community pediatrics at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center said.

“Kids learn how to talk if they’re encouraged to talk, and very often, if they’re just watching a screen, they’re not having an opportunity to practice talking,” he said. “They may hear a lot of words, but they’re not practicing saying a lot of words or having a lot of that back-and-forth interaction.”

Social skills cannot be nurtured when technology gets in the way.

“Also, (with) passive screen viewing that doesn’t have an interactive or physical component, children are more likely to be sedentary and then aren’t able to practice motor skills,” Nagata said.

HEALTHIER WAYS TO OCCUPY CHILDREN

If you need to rely on screens sometimes, opt for educational content or video chats with a loved one so they can still get some social interaction, Nagata said.

Quality of screen time, not quantity, is recommended by The American Academy of Pediatrics, and they do have resources for determining guidelines and limits for your family — such as its family media plan you can tailor to your own family’s needs.

It’s best to lead by example and limit your own screen time, and for children, turn devices off when not in use. Set a schedule if needed.

Julia Robison-Schultze, a BabyRead volunteer, abstracted this from an article written by Kristen Rogers, CNN, Updated Aug. 21, 2023.

BABYREAD’S MISSION is to raise the literacy level in Oconee County by encouraging moms/caregivers to read daily to children from birth. This prepares children for success in school and in life. Readers read with moms/caregivers in person regularly in public places, e.g. town libraries. Questions? Contact Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., president, at babyread@charter.net or (864) 643-8083 or visit babyread.org.