

THE IMPACT OF SCREEN TIME ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Key Research Findings

1 INTRODUCTION

Digital devices are an integral part of modern life, but excessive screen time can have significant negative effects on young children's cognitive, language, and social-emotional development. Research highlights the need for balanced screen use to promote healthy growth and learning.

2 BRAIN & COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

- Overuse of screens may cause structural brain changes such as cortical thinning, affecting critical thinking and reasoning.
- Excessive screen exposure limits real-world exploration, reducing problem-solving abilities and executive function skills. Multitasking with screens negatively impacts memory, focus, and academic performance.

3 LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT

- Face-to-face interactions are essential for language acquisition, and screen time can reduce meaningful communication.
- Background TV exposure is linked to delayed speech and weaker vocabulary skills in young children.
- Passive screen watching does not replace interactive verbal learning with adults.

4 SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIORAL IMPACT

- Excessive screen time is associated with higher risks of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances.
- Digital addiction: Gaming and social media use trigger the brain's reward system, making screen dependency harder to break.
- Sleep disruption: Blue light from screens suppresses melatonin, leading to poor sleep quality and behavioral issues.

5 AAP (AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS) RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Under 18 months:** Avoid screens (except video chatting).
- **Ages 2-5:** Limit screen time to 1 hour of high-quality programming per day.
- Encourage active play and real-world engagement over passive screen consumption.

Guidelines for Healthy Screen Use

6 BETTER SCREEN USE STRATEGIES

- Co-viewing with parents enhances learning and social interaction.
- Educational programs like Sesame Street are beneficial when watched together.
- Avoid YouTube autoplay and unregulated content to prevent excessive and inappropriate viewing.

7 HOW EDUCATORS & PARENTS CAN HELP

- Promote hands-on learning with puzzles, storytelling, and outdoor activities.
- Set screen-free times during meals and before bedtime to improve sleep and attention.
- Encourage social play through peer interactions rather than digital entertainment.

8 ADVOCACY FOR BALANCED SCREEN TIME

- Workshops for Parents & Teachers on healthy screen habits.
- Screen-Free Playtime Initiatives in schools and communities.
- Encouraging interactive engagement instead of passive screen watching.

9 RECOMMENDED RESOURCE

SCREEN TOOL KITS
WE CAN SCREEN TIME CHART
BOOKS

ARTICLES

- What Does Too Much Screen Time Do to Children's Brains?
- Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Child Development: An Updated Review and Strategies for Management
- Screen Time and the Brain

Sakshi Sankhyan