

The Many Downfalls of Kids' Addiction to Tech: Why Limiting Screen Time Will Benefit Your Child

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Some parents feel any form of technology or screens for kids, especially for young kids, is a bad idea. Other parents insist technology offers our kids positive resources, education and entertainment options we never had when we were growing up. Debates like this often get wild with people acting like it's a mini-war between screen-free advocates who are scared of technology vs. technology lovers who are advanced enough to appreciate it. It's sad, because in a perfect world, it's not all or nothing. Most of us have experienced the positive aspects of technology. We use it to relax, communicate, learn new things, compose music, make art and much more. In **moderation**, technology and screens are useful. The problem is that parents and modern-day kids have strayed far beyond moderate use of technology. In today's world, the average kid uses screen-based technology for 9 hours a day. Worse, many parents don't have a problem with this. Keep reading to learn about more alarming facts related to kids and technology, and some of the problems this may present for them socially, physically, developmentally and emotionally.



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How Much Screen Time do Kids Really Have?

If you think most kids are using tech in moderation, think again. Consider the following shocking statistics:

- Recent [Rasmussen College research](#) shows that 90% of all two year-olds have used a computer and 50% of five year-olds use a computer regularly.
- A study [released in June \(2013\)](#) by [Northwestern University](#) (pdf) shows that 21% of children under the age of 2 have a television in their bedroom while 40% of 6 to 8 year-olds have a bedroom TV set.

- More than 90% of all two year-olds in America have [an online footprint](#).
- [Zero to Eight: Children's Media Use in America](#) (2011) shows that among babies to 8-year-olds, 27% of their screen time is spent on cell phones, video iPods, and iPad-style tablet devices. Zero to Eight further shows that kids under age 2 spend twice as much time looking at the TV as they do looking at books and more than 39% of children 8 and under live in homes where the television is left on all (10%) or most (29%) of the time, whether or not anyone is watching it.
- The study, [How Teens View Their Digital Lives](#) shows that 90% of 13 to 17 year-olds have used some form of social media; 68% of teens text every day.
- [Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8 to 18-Year-Olds](#), the largest on-going look at youth and media available today, shows that 8-18 year-olds devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes to entertainment media every day (more than 53 hours a week) not including texting. Because 7th to 12th grade kids also report spending an average of 1 and 1/2 hours a day sending or receiving texts, this means the average child is looking at screens for around **9 hours a day**, or about **75% of their life** (while awake).
- A Nielsen [2010 study](#) shows that American teens send or receive 3,339 texts a month. That's 6+ texts per every hour they're awake.

Worst of all, the [Northwestern University](#) (pdf) discussed above, shows that a full 55% of parents are not concerned with how much tech their kids use; 78% think that watching TV is a useful distraction for kids; 59% of parents aren't worried about their kids becoming addicted to tech; and a majority of parents say that computer, TV, tablets and other tech media (besides video games) have a positive, not negative effect on children's creativity and educational skills.

Screen Time is Linked to Health Problems

Excessive screen use, such as kids are getting today, is linked to multiple [long-term health issues](#). For example:

- A recent Journal of the American College of Cardiology (JACC) study shows that individuals who devote [more than four hours a day](#) to screens, including TV, video games or surfing the web have a **113%** higher risk of heart attack and stroke and a 50% higher risk of death via any cause than people who spend fewer than 2 hours on screens per day. Oh, and even if an individual got plenty of exercise, the results were the same.
- Tendonitis in wrists and neck pain are both linked to too much screen time.
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and [kids cell phone use](#) are linked.
- Texting while driving is [proven to be deadly](#). Death is pretty much the biggest health risk. Yet, [60% of teens](#) admit they text often while driving.
- Mindless snacking and [overeating](#) have both been linked to sitting and staring at screens.
- The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) (AAP) notes that too much screen time may lead to sleep and eating disorders.

While some research says that kids who watch more than two hours of TV a day are more likely to be overweight, it's unclear just how much how screens affect weight. Still, consider that the CDC and other health organizations measure healthy activity levels on a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being the worst. Sitting ranks at 0, and sitting is what kids utilizing excessive screen time tend to do. Furthermore, the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans says that all kids and adolescents need 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity every day of the week. Most substantial research says you should get a lot more exercise though. With kids spending 75% of their waking hours on screens, it's insanely unlikely most kids are getting the required amounts of exercise in. In turn, tons of available evidence says that sedentary behaviour is directly linked to rising risks of obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Screen Time is Linked to Developmental & Social Problems

Excessive screen time can cause problems with development and zap social skills too. For example:

- Too much [hypertext and multimedia content](#) is currently linked to kids with limited attention span, lower comprehension, poor focus, greater risk for depression and diminished long-term memory.
- Research shows that TV and computer use are linked to [worse levels of psychological well-being](#) in kids, regardless of how much time the children spent on physical activity. Also alarming: when kids do other sedentary activities, their psychological well-being was better off. Meaning, screens are an actual independent risk factor for psychological problems.
- [Cyberbullying](#), a common theme kids run into online, has been shown to cause [profound psychosocial outcomes](#) including depression, anxiety, severe isolation, and suicide.
- A recent survey showed that [20% of teens](#) (pdf) have sent or posted nude or semi-nude photographs or videos of themselves online or via text. The problem, beyond the obvious, is that apparently teens don't understand the social implications of this.
- The Mayo Clinic notes that kids who stare at any screen for more than two hours a day are more likely to have emotional, social and attention problems and poorer performance on school tests.

The worst developmental issue of too much screen time may be that our kids have no idea how to interact with others. A [recent must-read article in *The New York Times*](#) looked into the phenomenon of parents [mindlessly handing iPads and cells to kids](#) in order to shut them up — so that the parents didn't have to deal with them. This article shed light on some scary facts. When kids are handed an activity, be it an iPad, a colouring book or another item in order to keep quiet, the child will vanish into their own little world, no longer engaging with anyone. The risks here are huge. Sherry Turkle, a professor of science, technology and society and author of the book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*, tells the *Times*, "Conversations with each other are the way children learn to have conversations with themselves, and learn how to be alone. Learning about solitude and being alone is the bedrock of early development, and you don't want your kids to miss out on that because you're pacifying them with a device." Dr. Gary Small, director of the Longevity Center and author of *iBrain: Surviving the Technological Alteration of the Modern Mind*, also weighed in, noting, "The brain is highly sensitive to stimuli, like iPads and smart-phone screens, and if people spend too much time with one technology, and less time interacting with people like parents at the dinner table, that could hinder the development of certain communications skills."

Screens Kill Imagination & Creativity

No one has absolutely proven that kids today, with their excessive screen time, have less imagination or creativity than kids of the past who didn't have much screen time, but there is some research that points to a link between screen time and dwindling creativity. One long-term (50 year!) research study shows that there's been a [significant decrease in creativity](#) among children in the last few years and they think it's due to a massive decline in playtime and real world experience. People are often impressed with little kids who can push buttons on shiny screens, but extensive research shows that the skills kids really need to develop have nothing to do with pushing buttons and everything to do with free play, first-hand experience with the real world around them and hands-on engagement with objects that manipulate all their senses.

Although we lack direct research linked to creativity and screens, here's what we do know for sure. Kids today are more hooked on screens than [ever before](#), and not just TV, [multiple screens](#). Research shows that homes in the 1970s had about [one TV](#). Today families, on average own three TVs, not to mention all the screens that people rarely owned in the 70s, 80s and even 90s, such as interactive phones, laptops, tablets, and more. While all these screens hold benefits there are major repercussions of being [raised in a screen filled world](#). Parents everywhere only have to open their eyes to see that kids today lack many of the key creativity skills generations before easily had, such as:

- Kids with one main interest – screen time.
- Kids who cannot entertain themselves for even a few minutes without screens.
- Kids who can't sit still at dinner, in the car or at school without looking at screens.
- Kids who don't go out to play ever or play indoors either. Legos, building forts and reading are activities some kids today wouldn't even think to do without parent urging.

Kids hooked on screens miss out on many key creative endeavours such as learning through active play, [having outdoor adventures](#), socializing via actual human interaction, entertaining themselves, feeling what it's like to be bored once in a while, and more. Lots of people think little ones being hooked on screens is just adorable. Research shows it's not that adorable. If your family is engaged in too much screen time, why not [cut back](#). Try a [screen detox](#) as the first step and see how your lifestyle may improve.