



Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

## SELECTED RESEARCH ON SCREEN TIME AND CHILDREN

The American Academy of Pediatrics, The White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity, and others recommend discouraging any screen time for children under the age of two,<sup>1</sup> and less than two hours a day of educational programming for older children.<sup>2</sup>

### CHILDREN SPEND TOO MUCH TIME WITH SCREEN MEDIA.

- On any given day, 29% of babies under the age of 1 are watching TV and videos for an average of about 90 minutes. Twenty-three percent have a television in their bedroom.<sup>3</sup>
- Time with screens increases rapidly in the early years. Between their first and second birthday, on any given day, 64% of babies and toddlers are watching TV and videos, averaging slightly over 2 hours. Thirty-six percent have a television in their bedroom.<sup>4</sup>
- Data vary on the amount of time preschool children spend with screen media, but even the most conservative findings show that children between the ages of two and five average 2.2 hours per day.<sup>5</sup> Other studies show that preschoolers spend as much as 4.1<sup>6</sup> and 4.6 hours<sup>7</sup> per day using screen media.
- Screen time can be habit-forming: the more time children engage with screens, the harder time they have turning them off as they become older children.<sup>8</sup>
- Including when they're multitasking, 8- to 18-year-olds consume an average of 7 hours and 11 minutes of screen media per day—an increase of 2.5 hours in just 10 years.<sup>9</sup> For older children and adolescents, excessive screen time is linked to increased psychological difficulties that include hyperactivity, emotional and conduct problems, difficulties with peers<sup>10</sup> and poor school performance.<sup>11</sup>

**SCREEN TIME IS AN IDENTIFIED FACTOR IN CHILDHOOD OBESITY.**

- Time with screens is an important risk factor for childhood obesity in both low-risk and high-risk populations.<sup>16</sup>
- Toddler screen time is linked to increased BMI.<sup>17</sup>
- Television viewing for children 3-5 is linked to increased BMI.<sup>18</sup>
- For each hour of television viewing per day, children consume an additional 167 calories.<sup>19</sup>
- TV viewing among two- to four-year old children predicts increased intake of high-energy, low-nutrient foods.<sup>20</sup>
- TV/video viewing for preschoolers is linked to fast food consumption.<sup>21</sup>
- Bedroom televisions are associated with obesity risk in children of all ages.<sup>22</sup>
- Time with video games is linked to overweight.<sup>23</sup>
- Video game playing increases food intake.<sup>24</sup>
- Children who own active video games such as the Wii do not show an increase of physical activity.<sup>25</sup>

**SCREEN NEGATIVELY IMPACTS CHILDREN'S SLEEP.**

- Screen time for children under 3 is linked to irregular sleep patterns.<sup>26</sup>
- Screen time is linked to sleep disturbance in 6- to 12-year-olds.<sup>27</sup>

**SCREEN TIME CAN UNDERMINE LEARNING FOR BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN.**

- Screen time for children under three is linked to delayed language acquisition.<sup>28</sup>
- The more time preschool children spend with screens, the less time they spend engaged in creative play<sup>29</sup> (the foundation of learning)<sup>30</sup>, constructive problem solving<sup>31</sup>, and creativity.<sup>32</sup>
- For babies and preschool children, time with screens is negatively correlated with time spent interacting with parents—which is essential for learning.<sup>33</sup> Even when parents co-view, they spend less time talking to their children than when they're engaged in activities such as reading or hands-on play with children.<sup>34</sup>
- Toddler screen time is associated with problems in later childhood, including lower math and school achievement, reduced physical activity, and victimization by classmates.<sup>35</sup>

**OLDER CHILDREN ARE ALSO AT RISK FROM EXCESSIVE SCREEN TIME.**

- Children with 2 or more hours of daily screen time are more likely to have increased psychological difficulties, including hyperactivity, emotional and conduct problems, and difficulties with peers.<sup>36</sup>
- Adolescents who watch 3 or more hours of television daily are at especially high risk for poor homework completion, negative attitudes toward school, poor grades, and long-term academic failure.<sup>37</sup>
- Adolescents with a television in their bedroom spend more time watching TV and report less physical activity, less healthy dietary habits, worse school performance, and fewer family meals.<sup>38</sup>

#### **RESEARCH SHOWS BENEFITS OF REDUCED SCREEN TIME.**

- Reducing screen time can help prevent childhood obesity.<sup>39</sup>
- Children who spend less time watching television in early years tend to do better in school, have a healthier diet, be more physically active, and be better able to engage in schoolwork in later elementary school.<sup>40</sup>
- Television viewing at a young age is associated with later behavioral problems, but not if heavy viewing is discontinued before age six.<sup>41</sup>
- Limiting exposure to television during the first 4 years of life may decrease children's interest in it in later years.<sup>42</sup>

#### **PARENTS ARE RECEIVING CONFUSING AND INACCURATE INFORMATION ABOUT THE EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF SCREEN MEDIA FOR YOUNG CHILDREN.**

- Some screen media has proven to be beneficial to older children,<sup>43</sup> but many products heavily marketed as educational make claims unsubstantiated by research.<sup>44</sup>
- There is no credible evidence that any type of screen time is beneficial to babies and toddlers and some evidence that it may be harmful.<sup>45</sup>
- 56% of parents of young children believe that baby videos are good for child development.<sup>46</sup>
- The most common reason parents give for infant and toddler screen time is that it is *beneficial to children's brain development*.<sup>47</sup>
- For young children, interactive books, or "e-books," have been linked to lower levels of story understanding and may hinder aspects of emergent literacy.<sup>48</sup>

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