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Why should we limit out children's screen time?

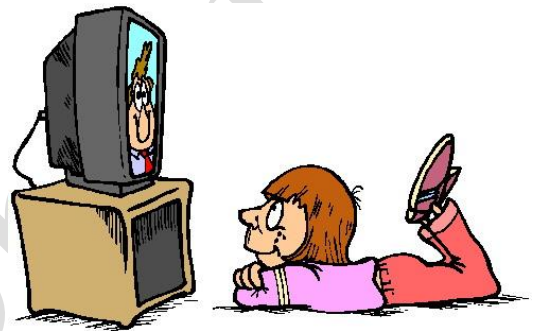
Our kids are growing up in a technological age. They are confronted with tablets, smartphones, laptops, DSTV and so much more. Your phone is seen as part of your image and our kids want the latest and greatest.

So why should we limit them?

The biggest concern I have is that kids are not spending enough time outside playing.

The reasons for this are:

- It's not safe
- Preschools are focusing more on academic performance
- More and more screen time is available in different formats



Safety

In the society we live in in South Africa it is a valid concern that our kids are not safe to play outside by themselves any more. Kids are told to stay indoors and this forces them to play stationary games or be involved in screen time.

Screen time

The inventors of children's television shows and games/apps target the primitive brain.

They use fast moving images and bright colours to target our visual system.

They use loud and quickly changing sounds to target our auditory system.

When I ask parents how long their child is able to concentrate they usually tell my 'Oh he can watch television for hours'. This is not concentration ability!!!! This is your child's primitive brain being targeted and activated.

Our poor teachers have no way to compete with TV and games and apps and we wonder why our children cannot concentrate anymore and why ADD and ADHD is being diagnosed more frequently in our kids!!!



According to research a child younger than 2 who watches television has a 15% higher risk of developing ADD/ADHD. Thus a child under 2 should not be exposed to ANY screen time.

Another big concern is that parents don't play with their children any more. Most families are dual income households and thus mom and dad work full day and are too tired to play with their kids. This is not ideal but this is what is happening.

Out toddlers don't know how to play any more as they are not used to thinking up games or spend time inventing games. Creativity suffers. We now have to teach our kids how to play house-house, how to play with cars and how to entertain themselves by playing in the garden. Screen time takes away creativity.

Academic performance

We as a society are placing more and more pressure on our children to grow up faster. Some pre-schools tend to focus more on academic performance like counting and getting to know the letters of the alphabet than playing outside. Children should be playing outside nearly all day long to facilitate the necessary skills they need for development.

Benefits of playing outside:

- Bilateral integration
- Postural control
- Activating the proprioceptive system
- Activating the vestibular system
- Sensory integration
- Socializing
- Gross motor skills
- Eye-hand coordination
- Eye-foot coordination
- Etc.



The impact of limited outside play:

- Poor postural control
So what is postural control?
It is the ability to have stability at your big joints and to maintain different postures. Our kids are not able to sit still any more. The reason for this is that they don't get enough vestibular (movement) and proprioceptive (deep-pressure) input. These 2 systems underwrite postural control. Children tend to slouch in their chairs, support their heads while doing table top tasks, exhibits fidgeting, rides on their chairs, changes their posture frequently while sitting. All of this is their bodies craving movement and deep pressure input.
So what happens in class?
Most teachers tell the learners to sit still. This will cause postural control to diminish thus postural control will decrease. Now the learner will spend so much energy and effort staying upright and still in the chair that no energy is left to pay attention to what the teacher is saying or to complete given work. These kids tend to rush through tasks or tire easily and fine motor skills then decrease thus they write untidily and make unnecessary mistakes.
- Poor vision
Kids start using ipads /phones at a very young age, when the visual system is not yet fully developed and not able to withstand this prolonged visual demand at near. This leads to a generation that is becoming increasingly myopic (nearsighted), as we have seen in China in the last 20 years. Digital screens also emit a lot of blue light, which has been shown to cause premature aging to our eyes - our children will need reading glasses 10 years earlier than what we do, and research shows that degenerative eye diseases due to this excessive blue light exposure is happening at a much younger age (up to 15 years earlier than in the previous generation).
- Weight gain
Obesity in our kids is getting out of hand! This leads to many other health and self-esteem issues
- Poor communication skills
This affects their ability in making friends, initiating conversations and to resolve conflict

So what can we as parents do?

- I am a mom myself and I know we sometimes use the television as a nanny. When we want to prepare a meal or have some time to ourselves it is easy to switch on the television and entertain the kids.

When you have to do this please then make sure it is a program of some value and appropriate for your child's age

- No screen time for kids under 2 years of age
- Children's screen time should be limited to 1 hour daily while in primary school and to 2 hours when in high school
- Have certain times during the day when no screen time is allowed e.g. while eating dinner/having a braai
- No televisions/X-boxes allowed in children's rooms
- Set the parental control on your television and internet (especially google)
- Spend time playing outside with your kids doing gross motor tasks e.g. kicking a ball, rolling down a hill, playing in the sand pit or sliding down a slide.
- Have their vision and eye-muscle functioning evaluated by an optometrist
- If you suspect that your child has poor postural control – take your child to an occupational therapist to assist you in improving this

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