

Do your 0-5 years old children need electronic screen products?

Electronic screen products become common in our daily life. These include televisions, DVDs, electronic games, computers, smartphones and tablet computers, etc.



Surveys conducted by Department of Health of Hong Kong showed that parents had already started to allow their babies under one year of

age to be in contact with these products. Whether they are used for entertainment or learning, parents might think that the earlier their children use the electronic screen products, the better prepared they would be for future learning.

Influence of electronic screen products

Despite young children can learn as quickly as a sponge taking in water, there is still no studies to show sustainable effects in learning for babies and preschoolers using screen products. International researches have confirmed that these so-called 'screen time' activities are mostly sedentary and excessive screen time activities will have negative impacts on children.



These include:

- ✗ Taking over the time for physical activities, causing overweight
- ✗ Affecting development of bone and vision
- ✗ Affecting motor skills development and language development
- ✗ Developing unhealthy eating habit
- ✗ Imitating inappropriate behaviour including violent behaviour
- ✗ Influencing sleep, concentration, social and communication skills



Prime time in development

The prime time in development for young children is before six years of age, in particular, birth to two. They spent 40 to 60 % of their day in sleep. They surely need to use the rest of the day in quality time to talk and play with their parents, engage in free exploration and physical activities to enhance healthy and all-round development.

These quality activities are particularly important for their learning, thinking and socialisation in the future.



Recommendations



Your child needs a large amount of parent-child interaction before two years old. Avoid letting him in contact with any electronic screen products



unless to do interactive video-chat under your guidance. If you think the use of certain screen activity may benefit his learning and development, always accompany and guide him and set limits for him.



For your two to five years old, the daily accumulated time for him to watch TV or use computer, tablet computer or smartphone should be restricted to within one hour. The screen activities should be interactive and educative, and to be carried out under your guidance.

Tips



Be a role model for your child and cut down screen time



Adults should keep the electronic screen products to avoid access by children easily



Do not often leave the screen products on to affect children engaging in other activities. Turn off any electronic screen during mealtime to facilitate communication among family members



Establish a soothing routine about an hour before bedtime doing relaxing activities instead of screen activities. Do not place any electronic screen products in the bedroom as they will affect sleep



Set up rules and consequences in regulating your child's screen time. Be consistent in carrying out



Avoid rewarding your child with extra screen time or punishing him with cutting it down



Choose suitable content of the screen activities carefully according to the child's age. Avoid programmes and apps with lots of sounds and images distracting child's attention from the content



When your child is engaging in electronic screen activities:

- ✓ Accompany him to talk about the content and give guidance to bring out the educational function of the product
- ✓ Ensure proper posture and keep proper distance (See photos below)



Smartphone



Tablet Computer



Computer

- ✓ Have breaks at times. Look at distant objects to relax the eye muscles.
- ✓ Often change postures to relax muscles of different body parts



You may engage your child in other activities if he asks for screen activities. Try to use quality time with your child to replace screen time.

Talking, reading, playing and doing physical activities with him can better facilitate his intellectual, language, motor and emotional development. If you want to obtain more information about parenting, please browse the following website:

<http://s.fhs.gov.hk/da3ph>



Weaning off the 'electronic pacifier'

If your child has already got into the habit of viewing smartphone or tablet computer, he might whine and cry when you refuse his want for the screen activities. Such situations can occur at the dining table or when going out. You might worry about him not eating or making a scene in the public and continue to give him the screen activities, in the hope that they could soothe him as what a pacifier did when he was a baby.





In fact, watching or playing with any **electronic screen products** will **distract children** from enjoying the food, **defeating their motivation in learning to feed themselves**, making them dependent on being fed as well as causing them to eat too much or too little.



Moreover, using these products to soothe children **may reward and sustain their inappropriate behaviours like whining or food refusal**.



There are **effective management strategies** for the problem behaviours. These include



When **toddlers** whine and cry, parents may **first stay with him**, use simple language to **recognise his feelings** and express his needs. For example, “you are angry because you really want to have it but you can’t”. Or use **distraction** to help him calm down before guiding him to cooperate.



For **older children**, parents may use “**planned ignoring**” to ignore his whining and cries. When he becomes relatively quiet, guide him to follow through your instructions and to **engage him in other activities to replace screen time**.



If the behaviour escalates, parents may consider **removing him from the site to help him calm down**.



Yet, the best is to **keep certain time and places ‘screen free’** for the child and the family to build up a healthy life style.

You may refer to the leaflets

‘Discipline Your Toddler in a Positive Way’



‘Managing the Behaviour of Your Preschooler I’



‘Managing the Behaviour of Your Preschooler II’



For establishing a healthy eating habit, details are found in our pamphlets

‘Healthy Eating for 6-24 Months Old Children (2) & (3)’

(2)



(3)



If you still have problems in dealing with your child's behaviour, you may contact health care professionals in MCHCs. We will provide guidance and arrange parenting workshop or the Positive Parenting Programme accordingly.

For more health information and videos on use of internet and electronic screen products, you may go to the following links to the Student Health Service, Department of Health web pages:
http://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/english/internet/health_effects.html
http://www.studenthealth.gov.hk/english/internet/video/health_effects_videos.html



Online Version



Family Health Service
Website : www.fhs.gov.hk
24-hour Information Hotline : 2112 9900



Department of Health
FHS-CH22A
(Rev Jan 2021)