



# The effect of screens on young children

**52%** of children in 5-year-old kindergarten spent 1 hour or more in front of a screen on a typical day in 2022<sup>1</sup>.

Excessive exposure to screens can affect young children's development, health and well-being, having a negative impact on their:

- > cognitive development
- > language development
- > socio-emotional development
- > physical development
- > neurological development
- > educational success
- > vision
- > sleep
- > lifestyle habits

Young children may be exposed to screens at home, at their educational childcare facility and at school (in the classroom and outside of class).

## Why should we be concerned about the effect of screens on young children?

- > During the first five years of life, a child's brain is developing at an astonishing rate. It is during this crucial period that children build the foundations for their future learning. Their capacity for learning is influenced by their experiences in early childhood.
- > Young children need to build relationships with those around them and their environment in order to develop and learn. Time spent in front of a screen can take the place of activities that would be more beneficial to their well-being and development.
- > Premature exposure to screens could have repercussions that last a lifetime.
- > The lifestyle habits adopted in early childhood last well into adulthood.
- > Young children's exposure to screens depends mainly on decisions made by the adults in their lives



Certain areas of the brain are particularly sensitive to screen exposure, such as those areas involved with language and emergent reading and writing skills.

## What determines how screens affect young children?

The effects of screen exposure do not depend solely on exposure time. Other factors can intensify or mitigate the effects of screens. For the same amount of screen time, the effects on young children's development can vary, depending on the context and nature of the content. For example, the effects may be moderate if the child is watching a screen with a parent who is interacting with them.

### Context

- Viewing alone or with an adult
- Time of day (e.g., before bedtime, during meals)
- Background exposure
- Reason for viewing (e.g., to calm, reward or keep a child quiet, or to support learning, creating, communicating or reading to a child)

### Content

- Age-appropriate or not
- Type of content (e.g., shows, games, videos)
- Educational or not
- With or without violence or sexually explicit material
- With or without advertising
- Image scrolling speed
- Degree of interactivity
- Active or passive (e.g., requiring more mental or physical effort than watching television)

Based on current knowledge, the use of screens at an early age entails more risks than benefits for early childhood development, even if certain actions can reduce those risks. Caution must be used regarding screen use for young children—not only by their parents, but also for anyone who has the power to determine the environments in which children grow and learn (such as educational childcare services, schools).



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