

**Limiting screen time?**

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CollegeENGL 1120-1121: College Writing and Critical Reading

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November 12, 2022

“Don’t sit too close to the TV; otherwise, you’re going to go blind” was something that my grandma would say to me when I was little. While this statement is not entirely true it still shows a bigger picture. Many people are concerned about the well-being of children that see too much screen time. This begs the question, should kids be limited on their screen time? For kids growing up, screens and technology take up a good portion of their life and those screens are not leaving anytime soon. Because of this, some people are concerned about what effects this has on their children. Because of a lack of parenting, some kids are spending six-plus hours a day looking at a screen, with no parental supervision. A big part of this is because parents see it as a way for their children to be entertained while giving them something to do. When children are engrossed in a screen, they are not bothering anyone and are having fun. I do understand that technology and screens can be good for children, but they need to be used in moderation. Kids that are spending too much time looking at screens could have major developmental issues; this includes their brains, education, social lives, mental health, eyes, and overall physical health. Because of this, parents should limit their children’s screen time.

Some people who have grown up with no limits looking at screens may be fine without limiting their kids’ screen time. I disagree with this. With an increase in screen time, one of the main fears is the negative effects that it could have on their brain development. Jennifer Cross, a doctor of behavior from New York-Presbyterian (2021), shows her concern for this issue when she says, “Children who spent more than two hours a day on screen-time activities scored lower on language and thinking tests, and some children with more than seven hours a day of screen time experienced thinning of the brain’s cortex, the area of the brain related to critical thinking and reasoning.” This is concerning because Cross (2021) talks about how nearly half of all children 8 and under have their own tablet devices. Because of this, they spend an average of

about “2.25 hours a day on screen time”. Sandee LaMotte from CNN Health (2019) writes, “The brains of children 3 to 5 years old and found those who used screens more than the recommended 2 hours a day without parental involvement had lower levels of development in the brain’s white matter.” This is a problem because the brain develops the most in the first 5 years. During this time the brains are “plastic” and “soaking up everything” which forms connections that will last for life. LaMotte (2019) goes on to say, “Perhaps screen time got in the way of other experiences that could have helped the children reinforce these brain networks more strongly”. It is shown that the increase in this daily screen time hurts brain development in kids. The reports have consistently shown how development is a lot of times stopped or developed incorrectly because of screens. All this points to the idea that kids spend too much time on screen time and should be limited on it.

In addition, many people think that technology is helpful for learning and doing well academically. While I can see that there are helpful parts of technology for learning, I think that younger kids, especially in the first five years should not be exposed to as much technology as they are. Cross (2021) brings this up by saying, “Development expands rapidly between 1½ to 3 years of age, and studies have shown that children learn language best when engaging and interacting with adults who are talking and playing with them.” Many parents resort to handing their kids a screen to play on to keep them entertained, but kids need human interaction and hands-on activities. Katherine Lee from Verywell Family (2021) states, “Simple playtime activities such as imaginary games or manipulating toys are deceptively important for learning and building creativity.” While you can learn things from technology there is a major benefit to doing physical playtime activities. Not only are they very important for development, but also as Lee (2021) says, “build communication skills, move their bodies, and get adequate rest,” which

are very important for development. UNICEF (2022) claims, “Screen time inhibits young children’s ability to read faces and learn social skills, two key factors needed to develop empathy. Face-to-face interactions are the only way young children learn to understand non-verbal cues and interpret them.” As screens are getting more and more popular in the classroom and school, we need to realize all of the negative implications they have on kids. Studies have shown that in general, development for learning happens best when they are engaging in human interaction. While there are still benefits to learning with technology, it is more effective to learn with it regulated.

While many see social media as a good way for kids to socialize and talk to people, kids should socialize in person because it’s healthier for developing social skills. Pediatrics from Cleveland Clinic (2022) say, “Children younger than 11 years old who use Instagram and Snapchat are more likely to have problematic digital behaviors like having online-only friends and visiting sites parents would disapprove of, as well as a greater chance of taking part in online harassment.” Limiting the amount of social media at an early age can reduce some of these negative effects and have them grow up in a more social environment. UNICEF (2022) talks about how “all communication is non-verbal, so they depend heavily on looking at a face and deriving meaning from that face. Is this person happy with me, or are they upset at me?” This is crucial for social development because like it said above, “they depend heavily on looking at a face” and if they never see a face, it becomes harder for them to tell if someone is angry, etc. at them. Michael Woods (2022) MD from Winchester Hospital talks about how “preteens who spent time away from screens became better at reading human emotions compared to their peers who were not restricted from screens.” As you can see socializing in person is much more helpful than on a screen. I still understand that you can socialize on technology, and I don’t think

that's a bad thing in and of itself but for building social skills, you need to talk face-to-face. As technology grows, we lose this aspect of life and data has shown that it is very important.

In addition, lots of people have underestimated the mental health and emotional control side effects of looking at a screen. This is a very good concern and pushes the fact that screen time should be more regulated for children. Chloe Castleberry from NVFP (2021) brings this up by talking about the development of mental health problems can start at a very early age. She explains how “use of digital devices and internet use is unsupervised can hurt kids’ mental health.” She then talks about how just the fact that they are spending time behind a screen can impact the child’s psychological well-being, and their ability to grow in an environment that is good for their mental health. She then talks about how early exposure to high amounts of screen time can lead to “worse sleeping habits” in the future and “lower self-control.” Both things can lead to anxiety and other mental health problems. Jean Twenge from the National Library of Medicine (2018) talks about this same problem. She says, “After 1 h/day of use, more hours of daily screen time were associated with lower psychological well-being, including less curiosity, lower self-control, more distractibility, more difficulty making friends, less emotional stability, being more difficult to care for, and inability to finish tasks.” She then talks about how little kids that start playing violent video games earlier have more aggressive emotions and deal with more mental health struggles. Common Sense Media (2021) brings up this concern. But research shows that viewing violent content could increase the chance that a child will act aggressively -- especially if other risk factors are present, such as growing up in a violent home. Heavy exposure to violent media can lead to desensitization too.” As time has been passing mental health has been getting worse and worse in general but especially in teens. If we can prevent that from happening by limiting the amount of screen time when younger, it would help this problem.

People tend to think that the idea of looking at a screen causes eye damage is a myth. I disagree with this, eye damage is a big concern for many people looking at screens, especially at an early age. Because of how much growth happens during childhood, the negative effects of screens on kids' eyes must be monitored. The first concern for eye damage is eye fatigue. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (2021) talks about this: "Asthenopia (eye fatigue) can be caused by overuse of the eye, for example during a period of prolonged focus on a screen. Any glare on the screen can further strain the eyes." They then go on to explain the side effects of this. They talk about how eye fatigue leads to "headaches, eye pain, or feeling tired, headaches". Because of this, they may lose interest in tasks that are healthy for children such as reading, playing outside, etc. Studies have found that children who spend more time indoors are more likely to develop nearsightedness. "Researchers believe UV light plays an important role in healthy eye development. The rate of nearsightedness in children has increased dramatically in the past 30 years." Another big thing would be the impact on sleep. Children that look at screens can have a disturbed sleep cycle. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (2021) Says, "Research shows that when computers and similar devices are used in the evening, the blue light they emit alters the brain's sleep rhythms. The brain reads the screen light as "daytime" and shifts the body's circadian rhythm." As many people know sleep is a very important part life for everyone but especially children. With the sleep cycle being interrupted it leads to other bigger problems. When it comes to overall eye health screens are not good for it. It is shown through a lot of research that it is even more detrimental for young kids because their eyes are still developing. This all goes to show how it is not a myth that screens are unhealthy to look at.

In addition, people have been tying child obesity with prolonged screen time. Kids that sit in front of the screen all day are not moving around which can lead to obesity. I understand that

there are technology-based activities that help kids move around but the majority of kids are not using those. Common Sense Media (2021) brings this up by talking about how “the more time you spend looking at a screen, the less time you spend outside or participating in physical activity. This in turn can lead to health-related issues such as obesity and diabetes.” They say, “Screen exposure leads to obesity in children and adolescents through increased eating while viewing and exposure to high-calorie, low-nutrient food, and beverage marketing influences children’s preferences, purchase requests, and consumption habits.” Not only does it lead to obesity in children but also affects you into your adult life. Anne Harguth from Mayo Clinic (2021) talks about how “studies show that excess TV viewing in childhood predicts risk for obesity well into adulthood. For example, kids who have TV sets in their rooms are more likely to gain excess weight when compared to those who don’t have TVs.” This clearly shows that to have a kid live a healthy lifestyle and decrees the risk of obesity, their screen time should be monitored. There is a strong correlation between kids who are looking at a screen for excessive amounts of time and obesity, which pushes home further the point of kids using too much screen time.

As you can see there are many negative effects of kids spending too much time looking at a screen. The problems can range from physical to mental, but they are all just as important and should be seen as a cause to reduce screen time. I realized while reading this how grateful I was for my parents and their strict policy on how much screen time I could have. Reading all the negative side effects made me realize that I needed to stop looking at screens and go outside more. When I was little, I wasn’t allowed more than one hour a day and sometimes even less or none. I couldn’t understand that but now that I am older, I can see now why I was monitored so heavily. Over time I have been able to notice a difference between me and my peers who were

allowed more screen time. A lot of them do not have good grades and it has consumed their life. some more of them are suicidal and have fought a lot with mental health. Too much time looking at a screen may not have directly caused those things, but it did help them develop. Because of this, I am grateful that my screen time was regulated. Looking back, you probably won't go blind from sitting too close to the TV but it's more the thought behind it that counts.

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