

Should screen time be limited to 30 minutes a day?

In recent years, there has been an explosion in technology that is being accessed every day. Every way you turn, you will see a device: at home, shopping centres, cars, buses, airports and even schools! Surprisingly in the UK, 80% of 2-4 year olds have access to a piece of technology and children over the age of 5 spend 6.3 hours a day on devices. Because of this, nearly half of the parents in the UK are worried about their children spending too much time online, especially with 84 million text messages being sent every year.

Many have argued that too much screen time can negatively affect your physical health. With backup from the NHS, screen time is believed to have cut into exercise time not only in the UK, but over the world, causing a higher risk of obesity. Scientists have claimed that having 4 hours or more of screen time ups the risk of a stroke or heart attack by 113%. Both have argued - alongside parents - that kids should be outside in the sunlight and not in the online metaverse where they can lead a sedentary life style. Specsavers, one of the largest optician companies, have also stated that risks of screen time include: headaches; sensitivity to light; sore, dry eyes; eye discomfort; and a drug-like effect on the brain and eyes. Recent studies have proven that children are twice as likely to experience myopia (also known as short-sightedness) than children from 50 years ago.

In support of this, psychologists have also raised their worries about children's screen time and emotional wellbeing. Produced by technology, blue light can trick your eyes and brain into thinking that it is still daylight and if children are on electronics, before bedtime, it impacts their sleep cycle which can also lead to sleep problems. Medical experts have supported this view, stating that children who spend less time outside have a higher risk of anxiety and depression. Scientists have said that this is because without time outside, the body cannot release the hormone serotonin, the 'feel good' chemical that regulates self-esteem and emotions.

Another issue is parents seeing changes in their children's behaviour and the lack of spending time as a family. Before technology was invented, families would play board games, explore nature and sit together at the dining table, but now, children's eyes are glued to the screens all day and will therefore pose problems in the future (such as impacting their career).

On the other side of the argument, many protest against screen time being limited, also it has many features that might be important, such as communication. Since the lockdown (Covid-19), apps such as Whatsapp, Zoom, Messenger and Skype have gained lots of downloads and they are still the most-used apps in history, especially in recent years when the pandemic started (back in 2020). If we did not have

communication apps, people wouldn't be able to communicate with anyone. On top of this, these apps allow you to call or text a friend or family member in a different country, and 84% of gamers have stated that gaming has helped them to discover new friends with the same interests.

Secondly, many educational experts have declared that electronics are crucial when trying to improve learning. On top of this, 70% of parents and carers say that devices are essential for their child's development and learning and this includes apps such as Dudo, T-Truckstars and BBC bitesize. In nurseries, it has been highlighted by staff that children who are accessing digital tools show more school readiness than those who have been deprived of these opportunities. Furthermore, 92% of teachers have confirmed that devices are an educational tool and homework - such as Mirodo and SATS companion - are accessed through screens. Since homework has been created online, parents and teachers have stated that more children are completing their tasks; they feel that it is a more enjoyable way of education as opposed to tests on paper.

Lastly, it is undeniable that 92% of jobs now require the use of a form of technology, therefore, a key requirement for many is being IT literate (knowing how to use a device).

In conclusion, it is clear that screen time can have a significant impact on children's mental and physical health and also on their abilities to meet face-to-face with others. In modern day Britain, technology is crucial, however heavily relied upon. From my point of view, screen time should be limited - due to the health risks - but it depends on how they are being used. If people are using it for education and career purposes, I do not think it should be limited but if it is for entertainment (watching videos or playing games) there should be a limitation. Another reason why it should not be limited is because people have friends and family in different countries and if screen time had a limit, many would not be able to communicate with them. Therefore, I believe that there should be guidelines to help parents regulate how much time that their children are spending - perhaps different years should have their own limit.