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# Screen Time and Development

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## What is "Screen Time"?

Media is everywhere and most likely increasing. Most children spend up to 3 hours of their day watching television, as well as accessing other forms of "screen time" whether video gaming, computer, iPad, or cell phone. Studies have shown that excessive media use can lead to attention problems, school difficulties, sleep and eating disorders. Screen time is a very sedentary (being inactive while sitting) activity.

## Brain Maturation

Lack of engagement in physical activity can affect healthy brain development. The brain is the most immature organ at birth and maturation requires expo-

sure to activities that enhance/challenge the experiences of the child. Repetition of activity develops the neuronal pathways, and a sensory-rich (touch, vision, smell, proprioceptive and vestibular input) environment shapes the brain.

The motor planning and coordination of crawling, walking, eating with a spoon are only the beginning of motor maturation. Young children learn the sequential process of motor movements when playing with LEGOs, problem solving by manipulating doll arms to dress her, imaginative play by playing dress up or pirates, conflict resolution by sharing

and compromise, and visual perceptual skills by completing puzzles, painting, and coloring. There has been a decrease of 3D play by the marketing of video programs. Despite the research showing the need for physical activity for healthy brain development, many children are engaging with screens rather than hands on play. Many issues have been linked to increase in "screen time" and decrease in active play.

In summary, the brain allocates neural space and specificity of skills depending on what is experienced. The brain remakes and rewires itself based on what we do and think.



## Physical and Emotional Difficulties

- > Obesity- weight increase of 6% for every hour of TV watched per day, 31% if a TV is in the bedroom.
- > Diabetes- 30% of obese children snacking while watching TV
- > Sleeping disorder- TV viewing is associated with irregular nap-time/bedtime schedule, and an overall reduced sleeping pattern
- > Cardiovascular disease -60% of obese children will develop heart and pulmonary problems as young adults.
- > Addictions- violent games have a very high addiction rate.
- > Poor social skills, problem solving, communication, conflict resolution
- > Shortened attention span
- > Isolation from social engagement
- > Attachment disorders - high association with addiction
- > Anxiety- now the fastest growing mental disorder in school aged children
- > Depression- statistics have doubled every year since 1980

## Screen-Time Alternatives

- ◆ First and foremost-UNPLUG
- ◆ At the very least reduce/limit the time spent in front of the TV as well as video gaming, I Pad, computer surfing on the Internet, social media.
- ◆ Encourage/plan interactions with board games, reading, music, puzzles, outside play
- ◆ Get moving with sports (not necessarily organized sports), play hopscotch, jacks, jump rope, go camping, take the dog for a run, ride a bike, scooter, skateboard, roller skate.
- ◆ Be a good role model by limiting your own screen time.
- ◆ Set school day rule of screen time limited to no more than 2 hours.
- ◆ Keep TVs and computers out of the bedroom
- ◆ Don't eat in front of the TV

### References:

1. Zonein Workshops (2015), Zonein fact sheet, Retrieved from <http://zoneinfactsheet>
2. Brown University (2014) Screen time: A guide for parents: Fritz, G.K. EDS, *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter*.