



There is plenty of research and anecdotal evidence that shows the use of electronics can be harmful to kids' mental well-being and physical health.

There's an increased number of kids who have developmental challenges and attention deficits, who seem to engage in an overabundance of screen time. Many often report "video games" as their favorite pastime. With information readily available within seconds via a Google search, and Amazon packages delivered within a day, we've become increasingly impatient. Children seem to have a harder time waiting for things, and their impatience is often on display at places like restaurants, where parents will readily provide electronics to keep children entertained, further exacerbating the problem and leading to reduced attention and decreased observation of social cues required for development of social intelligence. If kids spend their time looking down at their electronics, they're not learning from the environment.

I often have parents tell me their children are only able to focus while playing video games or using electronics. While it might look like a child is sitting still intently focused on their electronics, the visual input is comprised of a plethora of changing features that leads to scattered thinking and is correlated with more severe symptoms of ADHD. Parents shouldn't be deceived by their child's still and quiet outward appearance, and mistakenly identify their child as focused, as the visual input of video games causes rapid and drastic visual changes that quickly affect attention and focus. Their "focus" is on rapid distraction. As reflected in the book "Irresistible," the author explains how thousands of designers are on the other end of the screen finding ways to break down our self-regulation, which leads to behavioral addictions with screen time.

Not only are kids spending more time on personal electronics, but they're also spending less time with physical activities and time outdoors. "Safe" playgrounds have eliminated many pieces of equipment such as teeter-totters, merry-go-rounds, swings and jungle gyms. These types of outdoor activities are important for sensory processing, a foundation for the development of motor skills. They are also great sources of movement that improve strength and coordination. Some schools have used recess to leverage behavior, and if kids get behind in their tasks or get in trouble, they might lose the opportunity to play, which can lead to further setbacks and poor behavior. According to the authors of "ADHD 2.0" children often need a "time in" rather than a "time out," during which they can engage in a form of physical activity. Children are also being tasked to learn more at younger ages, and emphasis on all-day kindergarten further limits a child's exposure to play and outdoor activities. The less time kids play outdoors, the less they're exposed to certain stressors that can not only improve strength and tolerance to touch and movement, but also improve one's immune response.

An increased use of electronics can lead to greater chances of obesity due to changes in metabolic health and sleep patterns, which result in less energy and a reduced desire to engage in physical activity. I'm seeing more kids who struggle to do even a single pushup or sit-up, as a clear indication they're lacking age-appropriate physical strength.



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We should all strive to set good examples for our kids. Too often parents want their children to improve certain skills, yet parents might not emulate the desired behavior. The old “do as I say and not as I do” is not an effective strategy. When we’re with children, we should deliberately set aside time to avoid using personal electronics. We should take our kids outside and create opportunities for them to see us engaged in physical activity. Several times a week, parents should at least engage with their children utilizing body-weight activities such as pushups and sit-ups and coordinated activities such as jumping jacks, and a form of endurance exercise as simple as walking. It’s in our best interest to encourage regular behavior that helps kids expand their potential and keep them from becoming isolated in their fictitious game fantasies.