

Plugged in: Too much screen time could be harming children's brains

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BOSTON - In the digital age we live in, the little blue light is everywhere.

If you have a small child, chances are you've handed them a smartphone or a tablet to play with, either at home or to curb the fussiness at a busy restaurant.

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[Screen time linked to diminished brain development in young children, study says](#)

While it definitely makes parents' lives easier to hand their children screens for entertainment, a new study shows too much exposure could be detrimental to their brains.



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"We have never had technology like this, so we're all kind of pioneering as parents trying to raise healthy kids when there's so much competition for a child's time," said Cecilia Doucette, a technology safety educator.

The study, published in *Jama Pediatrics* this week, shows a direct link between screen time and brain development in toddlers.

Researchers studied dozens of children ranging from ages three to five and found that the more time kids spent looking at a tablet, their brains developed slower.

Scientists noticed less brain activity for skills like language and literacy.

"Children should be, for example, outside playing under the rhododendron, going into deeper and deeper levels of imaginative play - that's how the human brain properly develops, they should be interacting with their peers to develop empathy to develop all these interpersonal skills," said Doucette.

Doucette studies wireless technology and ways to make it safer for children and their families. According to her, not only are screens risky for brain development, but many tablets and cell phones could also be exposing children to harmful radiation.

"They're not just little people, their brains have a higher water content and we know scientifically that this radiation penetrates a child's brain far deeper than it does an adult's," said Doucette.

While too much screen time can be harmful, Doucette understands it's tough to avoid technology altogether. She recommends hard-wiring phones and tablets to shut off the radiation and keep kids in one place where parents can better monitor their technology use.

"We've kind of been on this all wireless all the time honeymoon, now that we're here we need to bring it back to the center and learn how to use technology safely, the message isn't 'No technology' but 'Safe technology,'" said Doucette.

There are several bills in Massachusetts trying to make technology safer for kids.

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