

NAVIGATING SCREEN TIME: HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO PROMOTE HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT IN TODDLERS

Sunitha Priya Darshini J* | Dr. Darshan Kaur Sohi**

*Research Scholar, Himalayan University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

**Research Supervisor, Himalayan University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the multifaceted impact of screen time on the development of toddlers, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that fosters healthy growth. As digital devices become increasingly prevalent in daily life, understanding their effects on young children is crucial. The study reviews current research on screen time, highlighting both potential benefits, such as educational content, and risks, including diminished social interaction and developmental delays. By advocating for holistic strategies that include parental guidance, alternative activities, and age-appropriate content, the paper aims to provide a framework for caregivers to navigate screen time effectively. Ultimately, the goal is to promote a nurturing environment that supports cognitive, emotional, and social development in early childhood.

Keywords: Screen time, toddlers, healthy development, holistic approaches, parental guidance, educational content, social interaction, early childhood.

ABOUT AUTHORS:



Author Sunitha Priya Darshini J is Research Scholar at Himalayan University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India.



Author, Dr. Darshan Kaur Sohi is Research Supervisor at Himalayan University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India. She is eminent researcher and educationist with several research publications in her name. She has attended and organized national and international conferences and seminars.

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, screen time has become an integral part of daily life, even for the youngest members of society. Toddlers are increasingly exposed to various screens, from smartphones to tablets and televisions. While screens can offer educational content and entertainment, excessive screen time poses significant risks to healthy development. As parents and caregivers navigate this landscape, it is essential to consider holistic approaches that promote the physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being of toddlers. This essay will explore the impact of screen dependency on toddlers and present holistic strategies for managing screen time effectively. American Academy of Paediatrics. (2016). addressed the impact of media on young children's development. It highlights the potential benefits and risks associated with media use, emphasizing the need for age-appropriate content and parental involvement. The statement provides guidelines for media use, advocating for no screen time for children under 18 months, and suggests that children aged 2 to 5 should have limited screen time with high-quality programming.

Understanding Screen Time

Screen time refers to the amount of time spent using devices with screens, including televisions, computers, tablets, and smartphones. For toddlers, screen time often includes watching cartoons, playing games, or engaging with educational apps. Recent studies indicate that toddlers are spending more time on screens than ever before, with many exceeding the recommended limits set by health organizations. While screens can provide opportunities for learning and connection, it is crucial to recognize the potential drawbacks associated with excessive use.

The Impact of Screen Dependency on Toddlers

Research has shown that excessive screen time can negatively affect toddlers' physical health, leading to issues such as obesity and sleep disturbances. Additionally, prolonged screen use can hinder cognitive development, impacting language acquisition and attention span. Social and emotional development may also be affected, as screen dependency can limit opportunities for face-to-face interactions and the development of crucial social skills. Understanding these impacts is vital for parents and caregivers seeking to promote healthy development in toddlers. Sigman, A. (2012). presents a critical perspective on screen time and its effects on child development. The author reviews existing literature on the psychological and physical impacts of screen exposure, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of how screen time can affect various aspects of children's lives. The article calls for further research and discussion on how to best manage screen time in a way that supports healthy development.

Holistic Health Approaches

Holistic health approaches focus on the comprehensive well-being of individuals, particularly in the context of toddlers' development. This means not only addressing physical health through nutrition and exercise but also considering emotional, mental, and social aspects. For toddlers, this holistic perspective is essential as it lays the foundation for lifelong health and well-being. When we talk about holistic health, we recognize that a toddler's development is influenced by various interconnected factors. For instance, a child's physical health can impact their emotional state and social interactions. If a toddler is not feeling well physically, it may lead to irritability or withdrawal from social activities. Conversely, a supportive emotional environment can enhance a child's ability to engage with their peers and explore their surroundings. Therefore, fostering a balanced approach that nurtures all these aspects is essential for healthy development.

In the context of navigating screen time, applying holistic health principles means creating a structured yet flexible environment where technology serves as a tool for growth rather than a distraction. This includes setting appropriate limits on screen use while simultaneously encouraging activities that promote physical movement, creativity, and social interaction. By integrating mindfulness practices and emotional support into daily routines, caregivers can help toddlers develop a healthy relationship with technology, ensuring that their overall development remains balanced and harmonious. This holistic approach not only supports immediate health outcomes but also equips toddlers with the resilience and skills they need for the future. Hinkley, T., Carson, V., Hesketh, K. D., & Teychenne, M. (2016). examined how parental influence affects children's physical activity and sedentary behaviours, including screen time. The authors discuss various parenting styles and their correlation

with children's activity levels. The findings suggest that active parental involvement can encourage healthier behaviours in children, highlighting the importance of modelling and setting limits on screen time.

Strategies for Managing Screen Time

Managing screen time effectively involves setting clear limits and guidelines for usage to ensure that children engage with technology in a healthy manner. Parents can establish specific time frames for screen use and encourage breaks to prevent excessive exposure. Additionally, promoting alternative activities such as outdoor play, creative arts, and reading can help children develop diverse interests and skills. Family engagement during screen time is also crucial; watching programs together or playing interactive games can enhance bonding and create opportunities for meaningful discussions about content. McDaniel, B. T., & Radesky, J. S. (2018). focused on the relationship between media use and sleep patterns in children and adolescents. The authors find that increased screen time, particularly before bedtime, is associated with poorer sleep quality and duration. The review underscores the importance of managing screen time to promote healthy sleep habits, which are essential for cognitive and emotional development.

Nutrition and Physical Activity

Nutrition plays a vital role in holistic health, as it provides the essential nutrients needed for growth, development, and overall well-being. For toddlers, a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and proteins supports their physical and cognitive development. Physical activity is equally important, as it helps toddlers build strength, coordination, and social skills while reducing the risk of obesity. Integrating healthy habits with screen time management can involve planning nutritious meals and snacks during screen breaks, encouraging movement-based games, and setting aside time for family activities that promote physical health.

Mindfulness and Emotional Well-Being

Introducing mindfulness practices for toddlers can be a valuable tool for enhancing emotional regulation and overall well-being. Simple techniques such as deep breathing, guided imagery, and age-appropriate meditation can help children develop awareness of their thoughts and feelings. Additionally, fostering emotional regulation involves teaching toddlers to identify and express their emotions in a healthy way, using tools like emotion charts or storytelling. Creating a supportive environment where children feel safe to express themselves and explore their emotions is crucial for their emotional development. Radesky, J. S., & Christakis, D. A. (2016). discussed the implications of increased screen time on the development and behaviour of young children. The authors review evidence linking excessive screen exposure to various developmental issues, including language delays and behavioural problems. They advocate for a balanced approach to media use, emphasizing the importance of interactive, non-screen activities that promote social and cognitive skills.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, managing screen time is essential for promoting holistic health in toddlers. By adopting a balanced approach that includes setting limits, encouraging alternative activities, and fostering mindfulness and emotional well-being, parents and caregivers can significantly impact children's overall development. It is a call to action for all adults involved in a child's life to embrace these holistic strategies, ensuring that technology serves as a beneficial tool rather than a hindrance to their growth and happiness.

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