

Empirical Article

Digital Screen Time Limits and Young Children's Psychological Well-Being: Evidence From a Population-Based Study

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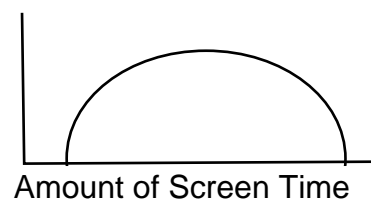
Abstract

There is little empirical understanding of how young children's screen engagement links to their well-being. Data from 19,957 telephone interviews with parents of 2- to 5-year-olds assessed their children's digital screen use and psychological well-being in terms of caregiver attachment, resilience, curiosity, and positive affect in the past month. Evidence did not support implementing limits (< 1 or < 2 hr/day) as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, once variability in child ethnicity, age, gender, household income, and caregiver educational attainment were considered. Yet, small parabolic functions linked screen time to attachment and positive affect. Results suggest a critical cost-benefit analysis is needed to determine whether setting firm limits constitutes a judicious use of caregiver and professional resources.

Nearly 20,000 parents is a large sample!

A parabolic function is simply a u-shaped function, such as the inverted u-shaped function shown in the graph below.

Amount of Child's
Positive Affect or
Child's Emotional
Attachment to
Parents



This function suggests that with moderate amounts of screen time, children's emotional attachment to their parents and their positive affect is highest. But with low amounts of screen time, children's emotional attachment and positive affect are lowest (they're less attached to their parents and less happy). And with high levels of screen time, children's emotional attachment to their parents and positive affect are also lowest (they're also less attached to their parents and less happy).