

What is screen time doing to the children?

Robyn Pearce

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But our present or future income-earning capabilities are only one facet of the issue. What about the children?

What is screen time doing to our children's brains?

There's a huge amount of research to show that screen-time distorts and damages our children's brains. Here's the essence of it for you:

- When children are growing, they need to develop sustained attention

It was people working in the television industry who told me, years ago, that there is a direct inverse relationship between the amount of TV a person watches (and these days we would include any devices providing entertainment) and the income they're capable of earning.



or concentration. Screen-time, even if it's used for education, cultivates the opposite – divided attention.

- 80% of brain-growth occurs between the ages of 0–3. That's when most of the brain's connections are formed.
- The French Government prohibits French channels from airing all TV programmes – educational and otherwise – aimed at children less than three years of age.
- The Belgian and US governments also now either have initiatives in place or recommendations to stop children under three from seeing any screen media.

If you're at all concerned about the impact of screen time (not just TV) on young children, look into the work of internationally respected psychologist Dr Aric Sigman and author of *'Remotely Controlled – How Television is Damaging Our Lives'*.

Here's are some excerpts from his work, mainly his scholarly article *'Time for a View on Screen Time'**

'In Britain today, children by the age of 10 years have regular access to an average of five different screens at home. In addition to the main family television, for example, many very young children have their own bedroom TV along with portable handheld computer game consoles (e.g., Nintendo, Playstation, Xbox), smartphone with games, internet and video, a family computer and a laptop and/or a tablet computer (e.g., iPad). Children routinely engage in two or more forms of screen viewing at the same time, such as TV and laptop. Viewing is starting earlier in life. Nearly one in three American infants has a TV in their bedroom, and almost half of all infants watch TV or DVDs for nearly 2 h/day.

'Across the industrialised world, watching screen media is the main pastime of children. Over the course of childhood, children spend more time watching TV than they spend in school. When including computer games, internet and DVDs, by the age of seven years, a child born today will have spent one full year of 24 h days watching screen media. By the age of 18 years, the average European child will have spent three

A randomised controlled clinical intervention trial divided 4–7-year-olds into two groups: one had its TV and computer viewing reduced by half; the other did not. After three years, there had been a significant reduction in the BMI of those who had halved their screen viewing, and relatively little in those who had not

years of 24 h days watching screen media; at this rate, by the age of 80 years, they will have spent 17.6 years glued to media screens.'

His lengthy article then goes on to expand on what the health impact of these rather alarming figures is now showing.

- There is a highly significant dose-response association between screen time (ST) and risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease (CVD) and all-cause mortality among adults.
- Increased TV viewing has been consistently shown to be linked to increased body mass index (BMI) in both children and adults. The association appears stronger in young children.
- Preschool children who watch more TV are fatter and are less active.
- Video game playing was found to significantly increase food intake in adolescents immediately after playing 'and was not compensated for during the rest of the day.'
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Some suggestions for management of screen time

- Restrict to 2 x ½ hour programmes per night per child.
- Have a TV-free night once a week
- Use a programme guide to sort what TV you want to watch, rather than just turning it on and channel surfing.
- Parents should be encouraged to monitor and control the time their children spend on hand-held computer games/media.
- Parents must take into consideration how much time their children spend doing homework on computers before coming to a decision on discretionary ST for their child.
- Parents should be aware of the role modelling influence their own viewing habits may have on their children along with the potential influence of background or 'passive' media.
- Information about infants and toddlers watching screens should be included within maternity ward 'birth packs' given to mothers.
- Health visitors should be aware of medical evidence and advise new parents.
- **Schools should adopt a position on the amount of time children spend in front of a screen in and out of school and communicate this to pupils and parents.**

You might want to do a quick analysis. How many hours are consumed by screen time in your classroom? In the homes of your scholars per day per person? And what about your own home?

* Excerpted with permission from Aric Sigman. Time for a View on Screen Time. Archives of Disease in Childhood. British Medical Journals November 2012 Volume 97 Issue 11:935 – 942. Full article at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232222451_Time_for_a_view_on_screen_time

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Robyn Pearce is known around the world as the Time Queen, helping people discover new angles on time. Check the resources on her website <http://www.gettingagrip.com>

including a free report for you: 'How to Master Time in Only 90 Seconds'. She travels regularly to Australia to work with schools on Professional Development days and also conferences.

Ideal discretionary ST limits:

3–7 years:	0.5–1 h/day
7–12 years:	1 h
12–15 years:	1.5 h
16+ years:	2 h

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