

# IMPACTS

**Screen awareness helps prioritize the developmental needs and wellbeing of young children amid many confusing and misleading messages about screen-based technologies.**

## What's wrong with screens?



Screen technologies can be effective tools for communication, organization, and learning for older children, teens, and adults but there is little evidence that screen use has benefits for babies, toddlers, and young children.<sup>1,2</sup>

Many apps and other screen-based programs are designed to capture and hold children's attention, which can result in overuse, behavior challenges, and exposure to harmful advertising.<sup>11</sup>

## Why be screen aware?



### Children's development

Research shows that the brains of infants and toddlers are not wired to learn from two-dimensional screens and that heavy exposure to screen media disrupts physical, social, and language development. Early tech use is associated with executive function challenges (the capacity to initiate and complete tasks). While some evidence indicates that preschoolers may learn from well-designed, developmentally-appropriate screen media, most apps and programs categorized as "educational" have no evidence to support that claim. They also take time away from real-world experiences proven to be educational for young children.<sup>4,6,7,8</sup>

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## Children's relationships

Screen use—by both children and adults—can interfere with the development of attachment between kids and their caregivers. Screens can distract adults, draw their attention away from children, and reduce the quality and amount of engagement and responsiveness that are the earliest foundations for attachment, trust, and self-regulation. Beginning in infancy, talking to children and responding to their vocalizations, (called serve-and-return interactions), are essential for children's brain development, as well as their acquisition of speech and language.<sup>2,12,16</sup>



## Children's desires, behaviors, and habits

The creation of digital content that manipulates human behaviors, neurological (brain) functioning, and beliefs is referred to as “persuasive design.”

Apps and programming that use persuasive design to manipulate children's attention, attitudes, and desires threaten healthy development. They also undermine children's ability to entertain themselves by promoting dependency on external entertainment and stimulation. (Many creative ideas grow out of boredom!)

Researchers, educators, mental health professionals, and many in the technology sector are raising alarms about technologies that exploit children's developing brains for profit and that reinforce neural pathways associated with addiction.<sup>6,11</sup>



## Children's eyesight, speech, sleep, and physical activity

Children are spending more and more time with screen media—at home, in care settings, and in classrooms. All that time adds up fast and takes away from activities that promote healthy development such as movement, play, exploration, and social interactions.

More time on screens (and less time outdoors) has been linked to greater risk for nearsightedness and other eye ailments. The blue light emitted from screens interferes with children's sleep, which contributes to behavioral problems, anxiety issues, academic struggles, and a wide range of health issues. Early smartphone and tablet use is associated with speech delays. Children who spend more time with screens are more likely to be sedentary and are at heightened risk for obesity.<sup>2,6,7,8,13,14,15,17,18</sup>

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