

## Opinion: Are kids getting addicted to technology?

August 20 2015, by Joanne Orlando

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Children can get a lot out of technology if they engage with it in a positive way.  
Credit: henry.../Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND

Are toddlers really becoming addicted to technology? There's certainly a lot of media hype to suggest that they are. And there's no question the

footage of small children breaking down when their tablet is taken away is unsettling.

Footage such as this is often aimed at showing the evils of [technology](#) and the myriad ways digital devices engender bad behaviour among [children](#).

Viewers are often put in a position where they naturally try to apportion blame for such behaviour. In this case, the apparent targets are the technology and even the [parents](#).

## Scare tactics

As an expert in children, technology and learning, I question the purpose and proper interpretation of content such as this, regardless of whether it's presented on [prime time TV](#), [headlining a newspaper](#) or a new addition to a [parenting blog](#).

In recent years society has been inundated with scare tactics around children's increasing use of technology. To date, media articles have blamed technology for various ills in society such as obesity, insomnia, violence, aggression and language development issues.

Unfortunately, these scare tactics often succeed because they cause a sense of guilt among adults and perpetuate a sense of loss of control.

But this type of thinking doesn't make sense. It suggests that by removing technology from their lives, children will be fitter rather than overweight, and [mental health problems](#) such as aggression and depression will diminish. Children's health and happiness are essential goals, but magic wand thinking is not going to get us there.

The other obvious target of blame when watching the above footage are

the parents themselves, and their seeming lack of ability to control their children's use of technology.

But, as any parent knows, [young children](#) can have tantrums over many things. At this age they're often not psychologically equipped to delay gratification, so we shouldn't be surprised at their response to technology. In addition, just because they can't delay gratification now doesn't mean they won't develop the capacity later in life.

## **Embracing technology**

Blaming parents for indulging their children is easy, yet many parents correctly recognise that technology is an essential part of modern life. Many professions now require the use of multiple devices over the course of a working day.

In addition, much of our social lives have migrated online, requiring us to make use of technology to stay in touch with our friends and colleagues. Even government support agencies require individuals go online to make a claim or submit an enquiry.

Forbidding children to use electronic devices hampers their ability to engage with the modern world. Research shows that technology offers many educational benefits for children.

These include encouraging them to work with more complex ideas from an [earlier age](#), promoting skills in collaboration and problem solving, accelerating learning in the [first year of school](#), [helping](#) children with [learning challenges](#) and enhancing [mathematics learning](#). School curricula around the world rely on technology for this very reason.

## **Balance is key**

For many parents, it seems we are damned if we do and damned if we don't. We have to weigh the risk of our children growing addicted to their devices against living a technology-free lifestyle and falling behind at school or with their peer groups.

My advice is to shift attention away from the blame game and instead consider our children's world as it truly is, to focus on facts and reality.

Technology has changed our lives, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. Children's love for [digital technology](#) is obvious, and mirrors the devotion many adults have for their devices. Try to restrict an adult's access to their mobile or tablet and see how they react!

Balance is the key. We must understand how technology can be properly managed so that the main activities [in the home](#) are not family members isolated in their own technological cocoon.

To encourage positive interactions, parents should provide an opportunity for a wide variety of tech-based experiences that support children's learning but also develop realistic and consistent messaging about screen time.

Parents also need to model controlled uses of technology themselves. A parent who consistently tells a child to get off their device when they themselves are always on one will not go unnoticed by the child. Balance is important, and in our tech-based society, it's important for children and adults alike to maintain a healthy balance of activities in their life.

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