Screen time tied to mental health problems in kindergarten children

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Screen time is associated with mental health problems in children aged 3–6 years, according to a study published online Dec. 4 in *JAMA Pediatrics*.

Haiwa Wang, from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and colleagues explored changes in screen exposure across different content types and their relationship with mental health in children ages 3–6 years. The analysis included data from 15,965 participants in the Shanghai Children's Health, Education and Lifestyle Evaluation-Preschool study (November 2016 to May 2019 when children were aged 3–4 years [wave
1), 4–5 years [wave 2], and 5–6 years [wave 3]).

The researchers found that as children developed from ages 3–6 years, the proportion of screen exposure to educational programs (no more than one hour per day: 45.0 to 26.8 percent) and entertainment programs (no more than one hour per day: 44.4 to 32.1 percent) decreased, while exposure to social media increased (no more than one hour per day: 1.5 to 27.1 percent).

A higher proportion of screen exposure to educational programs was associated with a lower risk for mental health problems (adjusted odds ratio, 0.73), but non-child-directed programs were associated with a higher risk for such problems (adjusted odds ratio, 2.82). Total screen time was consistently associated with mental health problems, regardless of content.

"Limiting children's screen time, prioritizing educational programs, and avoiding non-child-directed programs are recommended," the authors write.