

# Study finds toddlers fixated on screens talk less with parents

March 5 2024, by Ernie Mundell

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Using TVs and tablets as "e-babysitters" really cuts down on the time

toddlers spend interacting with parents or other caregivers, new research shows.

The Australian team of investigators are calling the phenomenon "technoference"—a scenario where "young children's exposure to screen time is interfering with opportunities to talk and interact in their [home environment](#)."

The researchers published their findings March 4 in the journal [JAMA Pediatrics](#).

Current guidelines from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) for kids ages 2 to 5 recommend "no more than one hour per day [of media use], to allow children ample time to engage in other activities important to their health and development."

Unfortunately, many toddlers are being exposed to screens at much higher rates than that.

In the new study, researchers led by Mary Brushe, of the University of Western Australia in Adelaide, tracked the amount of screen time toddlers from 220 families consumed on an average day.

They also monitored how much time those kids spent chatting with their parents. Kids were tracked from the ages of 12 to 36 months.

Brushe's group used advanced technology to track all this: Every six months, the children spent a day wearing special T-shirts or vests that were outfitted with sensitive monitors. The monitors tracked and differentiated between electronic noise (emitted by screens) and language spoken by the child, the parent or another adult.

The study's main finding was clear.

"Increases in screen time were associated with decreases in measures of parent-child talk," the researchers found.

By the age of 3, the average child in the study was watching some type of screen for two hours and 52 minutes each day.

And "for every additional minute of screen time, children heard fewer adult words, spoke fewer vocalizations and engaged in fewer back-and-forth interactions," Brushe's group found.

Put more concretely, by the age of 3 every extra minute spent looking at a TV or computer screen was linked to 6.6 fewer words spoken with an adult that day, the team found.

Parents may not be aware of the impact of screen time on kids' development and may be "needing support in understanding the potential association of [screen time](#) with opportunities for children and adults to talk and interact in their home environment," the researchers said.

Speaking with the *New York Times*, Sarah Kucker, an expert in [language development](#) and [digital media](#) at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, called the Australian findings "impressive."

"Media is not going away," Kucker said, "but paying attention to how and when media is used may be a good future avenue."

**More information:** Find out more about media's impact on your toddler at the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

Mary E. Brushe et al, Screen Time and Parent-Child Talk When Children Are Aged 12 to 36 Months, *JAMA Pediatrics* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2023.6790](#)

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Citation: Study finds toddlers fixated on screens talk less with parents (2024, March 5) retrieved 28 April 2024 from

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