

# Video games may be OK for toddlers—if mom or dad join in

10 April 2018, by Alan Mozes, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—Parents, you may be able to stop feeling guilty about letting your toddlers play video games—as long as you're playing with them.

That's the suggestion of a small study on the effects of touchscreen technology on kids' development. The research dovetails with growing concern that toddlers might be harmed as technology takes center stage in their lives and video games push aside [physical activity](#).

"Given the scope of our study, we cannot speak towards whether or not using technology as a standalone 'babysitter'—meaning sticking an iPad in a child's hands and walking away—is not to the child's advantage," said study author Nick Antrilli.

"However, we did see that social interactivity, at least when initiated by the toddler, could be somewhat beneficial," added Antrilli, who is a doctoral candidate at the University of California, Santa Cruz Infant Development Lab.

The study found that 2-year-olds who engaged in a physical activity—like crawling through a tunnel or playing ball—did better on a test of [mental flexibility](#) than did toddlers who were left to play video games on their own.

But the researchers also found that when toddlers played non-educational video games with an adult, rather than alone, they did no worse on the test than toddlers who ran around.

For their experiment, the researchers divided 78 2-year-olds into three groups.

One group was given nine minutes to draw and color, while another engaged in physical activity. The third group was handed a touchscreen device loaded with a non-educational [game](#) that kids could play at any pace they chose.

Then, they all were asked to sort objects, first by shape and then by color, to assess their mental flexibility.

At first blush, the investigators noted that the physical activity group performed best. But they also noticed that kids with touchscreens did just as well overall as those in the drawing group.

Digging deeper, they noticed that some kids chose to play the [video game](#) on their own, while others invited adults to join in. It turned out that kids who played with adults not only did better on the sorting task than those who played alone, they also performed as well as the physical activity group.

The findings suggest that it might not be what children do, but rather how they do it, that affects their development.

The findings were presented Friday at the American Psychological Association Conference on Technology, Mind and Society, in Washington, D.C. Research presented at meetings is considered

preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Antrilli said the study was only "exploratory" and noted that the group differences were small enough to be considered insignificant.

"More research is needed, to clarify what role social interaction during touchscreen gameplay has on toddlers' cognitive flexibility," Antrilli said.

Dr. Elsie Taveras, head of the Kraft Center for Community Health at MassGeneral Hospital for Children in Boston, suggested that the social interaction is a pediatric plus.

"Broadly speaking, positive social interactions with trusted adults and caregivers can be beneficial for children's development and learning," she said.

"For example, when a [toddler](#) or young child babbles, gestures or points, and a trusting adult or caregiver responds appropriately with eye contact, words or a hug, research shows that neural connections are built and strengthened in the child's brain that support the development of communication and social skills," she said.

"This back-and-forth process is fundamental to the wiring of the brain," Taveras added, "especially in the earliest years."

**More information:** Nick Antrilli, doctoral candidate, Infant Development Lab, University of California, Santa Cruz; Elsie Taveras, M.D., M.P.H., executive director, Kraft Center for Community Health at MassGeneral Hospital for Children, and professor, nutrition department, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston; April 6, 2018, presentation, American Psychological Association Conference on Technology, Mind and Society, Washington, D.C.

There's more on children, learning and technology at the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#).

Copyright © 2018 [HealthDay](#). All rights reserved.

APA citation: Video games may be OK for toddlers—if mom or dad join in (2018, April 10) retrieved 24 November 2020 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-04-video-games-toddlersif-mom-dad.html>

*This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.*