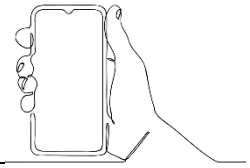
speech pathology TASMANIA

Screen Time and Language Development



Most people use screens often across their day. This includes television, tablets, phones, computers, video games and cinema. People use screens for work, keeping in touch, and having fun.

Many researchers have been studying what screen time does to people, both children and adults. The research shows links between too much screen time and problems in a range of areas, including:

- Attention
- Learning
- Speech and language development
- Self-esteem
- Fitness
- Sleep
- Mood (e.g. anxiety and depression)

Because of this, researchers agree that there can be "too much" screen time, and that people should think about how much time they spend on screens.

This is especially important for babies and children. Their brains are still growing, and screens can make them develop differently. In the first three years of life, children's brains triple in size. Their brains grow in the areas that they need for their world. If they spend a lot of their time watching videos and playing symbol-matching games, they will be really good at watching videos and playing symbol-matching games. But they might not have a chance to develop the skills needed for other activities, like talking to other people, trying new things, or entertaining themselves. Until the age of 6, children are developing the basic brain skills (cognitive and processing) they need for learning across their whole lives. Research over many decades has found that direct adult-child play and talking is key to language and social development. Children who have too much screen time may spend less time playing and talking with caregivers, which can lead to problems with speech and language learning during this important stage of development.

How much screen time is recommended?

The **World Health Organisation** makes the following recommendations about screen time, based on children's ages:

Birth - 2 years	•None. •Screen time is not recommended, other than interactive video-calls with in-person support.
3 - 5 years	•1 hour of supervised screen time per day
6 years +	•Hours not stated •Healthy usage and activities are encouraged.

Key Points about Screen Time & Language Development

Screen Time Up, Language Skills Down

A 2020 review of 42 studies into screen time effects on language development found that too much screen time in children under 3 years old is linked to weak language skills[1]. Studies have shown that young children who spend a lot of time on screens:

- understand and use fewer words
- don't understand as much language
- Have poorer problem-solving skills

Read Books and Play

Screen time should not replace reading to and playing with your child.

Children who spend time with caring adults in play and shared experiences are more likely to develop strong language skills, as well as a range other benefits, such as better social and emotional skills, attention, and literacy.

Make it Interactive

Interacting with children while they do screen-based activities can lead to benefits instead of negatives. This includes:

- Watching together and talking about what you see
- Sharing a device or sitting near each other on separate devices to play games together.

Remember, interaction between the **adult and child** is what is important, not the child and the device.

Quality Matters

Educational programs, such as Play School and Sesame Street, may have no effects or some benefits to older children (3 years +).

For 3–5-year-olds, choose shows that have:

- Labelling of objects and concepts, e.g. "Look at the rain! It's raining!"
- People or characters speaking directly to the child, e.g. "Hello! Let's go look at the fish!"
- Back and forth interaction, such as following instructions, calling out, or talking back to the speaker on-screen.
- Songs and sing-along
- No ads

Think About Your Screen Time

Remember: when your attention is on a screen, you may not notice when your child tries to talk to you. When they look at you, they see you are on a screen. This stops them trying to show you what they were excited about. Then they have lost that chance to develop language and other communication skills. We all need to use screens often. But we can think about when we do this, and make sure that sometimes we are ready and waiting for our children to show and tell us things.

[1]Madigan, S., McArthur, B. R., Anhorn, C., Eirich, R., & Christakis, D. A. (2020). Associations Between Screen Use and Child Language Skills: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 174(7), 665-675. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.0327.

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