

Studies Show Too Much Screen Time Detrimental to Kids' Health

Another school year is off and running. Every year teachers spend the first month of school fighting to grab and hold students' attention for longer and longer periods of time. Students often return from summer jittery and struggle to concentrate on a task for longer than a few minutes. More and more parents and teachers report attention deficit problems in their students each year. A recent study released by Iowa State researchers, published in the American Academy of Pediatrics, may explain some of this behavior. The study was the latest to prove detrimental effects of spending too much time watching a screen, be it TV shows or video games. The study was done on elementary students in ten different schools in Iowa and Minnesota over a period of 13 months. They discovered that children with above average screen time were 1.5 to 2 times more likely to have attention problems. The kids in the study averaged 4.26 hours of TV or video game time per day. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than 1-2 hours a day. The researchers found that even as the year went by, attention problems grew noticeably worse for students who spent a lot of time watching TV and playing video games.

Its not just elementary kids who are in danger, many high school kids spend an inordinate amount of time playing video games from the time they get home until they go to sleep. Research shows a definite connection between screen time and adolescents' attention and school performance. Even college-age students were shown to have similar problems with attention related to increased screen time. Unfortunately, by the time students are in college, if they choose to play video games all night long, there isn't a whole lot that parents can do. It's essential to educate and build self-discipline in children long before that time.

I didn't have to look farther than my own household to confirm this study was true. For a five year old, Braden has developed quite an unhealthy addiction to our Nintendo Wii, as well as computer games and television. For the past month we've been trying to wean him off television, computer games, and Wii so that he'll be a little better prepared for school. It is really amazing the amount of video stimulation that is available to kids compared to 20 and 30 years ago. And it's not easy to turn off the TV and computer, but it really all comes back to setting stern limits. This past summer was a little tough with all the hot and humid weather, and kids didn't want to be outside quite as much as normal, however, there are plenty of things kids can do without watching TV or playing video games. Make a list of all the different games and activities your children can play that don't involve a TV or computer screen. Then, when they get bored, have them pick something off the list. Children do not develop skills and abilities like creativity, problem solving, and teamwork by sitting in front of a TV screen or playing a video game. They develop these abilities by playing outside with friends, making up their own games, play-acting, building things, and reading. The great thing is all of these activities are virtually free!