# Parental technology use linked to impaired development in children under five



A recent study has highlighted the detrimental effects of parental technology use on young children's development, particularly focusing on children under five years old. Conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong in Australia, the study underscores the concept of "technoference," defined as the interference of technology in interpersonal relationships, especially within families.

The researchers synthesised data from 21 previous studies, analysing responses from approximately 14,900 parents worldwide who have children aged between 0 and 4.9 years. Their findings indicate that parental technology use in a child's presence significantly correlates with several adverse outcomes for the child, including impaired cognition and prosocial behaviour, lower emotional attachment, and increased behavioural problems. The report, published on May 5, warns of the potential negative impact on children's health and development, stating, “Parental technology use in their child’s presence was significantly associated with poorer cognition and prosocial behaviour, lower attachment, higher levels of internalising and externalising problems, and higher levels of screen time.”

The study posits that when parents frequently distract themselves with digital devices—be it through social media or other online activities—the interactions between parent and child are disrupted. This interruption can foster feelings of neglect in children, as they may perceive a need to compete for their parents' attention. The clinicians involved noted, “Such intrusions may disrupt the natural flow of interactions, which is particularly important as young children are acquiring critical social and language skills.”

Importantly, the implications of these findings not only pertain to cognitive and social skills but also extend to physical activity and sleep patterns among children. The research highlights the idea that persistent distractions from technological devices could lead children to misinterpret their parents' behaviours, further complicating the child-parent dynamic.

These findings resonate with previous investigations into technoference, which suggest that excessive screen use by parents can adversely affect children's language development. Tiia Tulviste, a lead author of another study from the University of Tartu, commented on the significance of face-to-face interactions, stating, “While reading e-books and playing some educational games may offer language learning opportunities, during the first years of life, the most influential factor is everyday dyadic face-to-face parent-child verbal interaction.”

As parents and caregivers navigate the complexities of modern technology, the research presents a compelling consideration of the potential ramifications on the crucial early years of child development, reinforcing the importance of meaningful engagement over screen time.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.uow.edu.au/media/2024/we-reviewed-100-studies-about-little-kids-and-screens.php> - This article from the University of Wollongong discusses a comprehensive review of 100 studies on the impact of screen use on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, highlighting the importance of co-viewing and age-appropriate content.
2. <https://www.mdpi.com/2227-9067/9/10/1577> - This study examines the association between children's screen time and their language development, finding that increased screen time for preschool-aged children and their mothers is linked to poorer language development in children.
3. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/developmental-psychology/articles/10.3389/fdpys.2024.1404235/full> - This research explores the relationship between screen time and language skills in children aged 2.5 to 4 years, revealing that higher total screen time is associated with poorer vocabulary and grammatical skills.
4. <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/brain/use-digital-devices-may-affect-childrens-language-development> - This article from the University of Helsinki discusses a study linking increased screen time, especially when children use screens alone, to poorer language development, emphasizing the importance of parent-child interaction over screen time.
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6. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/fare.12811> - This study investigates how parents' technology use behaviors influence their locus of control and, subsequently, child problem behaviors, highlighting the broader impact of parental screen time on child development.
7. <https://nypost.com/2025/05/06/lifestyle/parents-obsessive-technology-use-may-have-serious-long-term-effects-on-babies-and-toddlers-study/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data