

Do Touchscreens Make Your Toddler More Distractible?

Jan. 28, 2021, at 8:31 a.m.

More

U.S. News & World Report

BY ROBERT PREIDT, HealthDay Reporter

THURSDAY, Jan. 28, 2021 (HealthDay News) -- Too much screen time can make your toddler more **distractible**, British researchers warn.

The use of smartphones and tablets by babies and toddlers has soared in recent years.

"The first few years of life are critical for children to learn how to control their attention and **ignore distraction**, early skills that are known to be important for later academic achievement," said lead author Tim Smith, a professor at the Center for Brain and Cognitive Development at Birkbeck, University of London.

"There has been growing concern that toddler touchscreen use may negatively impact their developing attention, but previously there was no empirical evidence to support this," Smith added.

To learn more, Smith's team studied toddlers with different levels of touchscreen usage, assessing them at 12 months, 18 months and 3.5 years of age.

At each visit, the toddlers did computer tasks while an eye-tracker measured their attention.

Objects appeared in different locations of the computer screen, and researchers monitored how quickly the children looked at the objects and how well they ignored distracting objects.

Toddlers with high daily touchscreen use were quicker to look when objects appeared and were less able to resist distraction than those with little or no daily screen time, the study found.

Main researcher Ana Maria Portugal, an associate research fellow at Birkbeck University of London, said the team could not conclude, however, that touchscreen use caused the attention differences.

"It could also be that children who are more distractible may be more attracted to the attention-grabbing features of touchscreen devices than those who are not," she said in a news release from the University of Bath.

But co-investigator Rachael Bedford of the University of Bath said that the researchers' next step is clear.

"What we need to know next is how this pattern of increased looking to distracting objects on screens relates to attention in the real-world: Is it a positive sign that the children have adapted

to the multitasking demands of their complex everyday environment or does it relate to difficulties during tasks that require concentration?" she said in the news release.

Bedford is director of the Statistical Analysis of NeuroDevelopment and Psychopathology in Infants and Toddlers lab, also known as SANDPIT.

THINKING ABOUT ISSUES. Logical thinking skills are needed to analyze an issue. You can develop these skills by using the following structured questions:

Article Title: Do Touch Screens Make Your Toddler More Distractible?

1. What is the issue? State the issue concisely.

2. WHAT is the issue's background? Use background information to help put the issue in context and make it relate to one's own personal experiences.

3. WHAT are the perspectives on the issue? Identify and explore different viewpoints, both conventional ones and new ones,

4. WHAT is your stand or view? Take a firm stand, one that can be defended

5. WHY should your stand or point of view be supported? Consider ways your stand may be questioned or challenged.

6. WHAT kinds of questions does this issue raise? Develop exploratory questions, (what, where, why, when, how?), which will help you understand the core of the issue, and will reinforce the issue's importance.