Is screen time the real problem for our kids?

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With the pandemic, screen time has never been as high as today. During the first lockdown in 2020, French children, aged 6 to 12, spent 7 to 8 hours online mainly because of online class and school work, but also to keep connected to friends and relatives[1]. Research shows that excessive screen time put children at risk of developing obesity[2], sleep issues, depression, anxiety[3], self-harm and suicidal behaviours[4]. This evidence can worry a lot of parents who have been home-schooling their children during Covid-19. However, screen time should no longer be the only area of concern and the debate should move to screen use. What children do on screens, how they do it and with whom they do it is as important as how long they spend on their devices.

Focusing only on the amount of screen time is not enough in the analysis of the risk today[5]. There are many other factors that would need to be taken into consideration, such as the type of use, the personality of the user, his/her lifestyle, family dynamics and gender.

For example, girls experience more feelings of depression than boys when they use social media a lot, as they tend to negatively compare themselves[6][7]. When social media is used passively, it leads more to negative feelings than when it is used actively.[8]

Extraverts and sociable individuals with intense use of social media are less at risk of developing feelings of isolation compared with emotionally unstable individuals.[9]

The only most proven consequence of excessive screen time is obesity as a sedentary lifestyle is associated with poor diet, decreased sleep time and insufficient physical fitness. [10]

Therefore, instead of focusing on screen time only, parents should better monitor their children screen use, keeping the communication open and ensuring they keep a balance with offline activities. However, becoming good digital parents in helping children use technology in a responsible way is not easy and it takes a family-based approach to succeed. This is why Kids Life Studio offers support to families struggling with screen-life balance. With a play-based and preventive method, Family Coaching is a solution for healthy use of technology in the family.

Written by Aurelie Andriamialison
Brand Ambassador at Seeds of Joy Kids Life Studio
Mont-sur-Rolle, Switzerland

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